

# Narrative Ethics, Narrative Aesthetics: Functions, Characters, and Effects

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Over a number of years I have attempted to conceal a growing collection of books. This is not to say that a large home library is an embarrassment, or that it should be a necessary thing to hide from friends and colleagues. What has become rather apparent is this; the more books one has, the more questions about books and reading one must answer. Interestingly enough, when visitors see the shelves there are two types of responses. The first and most common, likely due to the abundance of graduate students in my circle of friends, is one of joy and a desire to use me as a sort of librarian. The second response, which gives me not a small amount of concern, as well as the motivation for concealing at least half of my library, is the vague questioning of those who don't read for either pleasure or work. (Some sort of variant of "What could you possibly need these books for?") Apparently, for people who never got into the reading habit, it is confusing to understand the nature of the relationship between oneself and a good story, the bond *per se*. Even more apparent is my inability over the last few years to give these inquiries a decent answer. When asked why I have held on to so many books, I begin to explain the stories and the characters, and while doing so, the emotions and memories from the story flood back to me. So there I stand, teary-eyed, clutching *Jane Eyre*, exclaiming, "But his wife was in the attic the *whole time*," while an oblivious inquirer is left wondering how such an intelligent woman can have such a vibrant relationship with something composed of paper.

This rather embarrassing confession, while establishing a bit of insight regarding my motivations for writing this thesis, hopefully highlights the importance of the relationship that a reader enters into when reading a book. What is it that draws a reader into a story, keeps them there for hours at a time, and then releases them with a feeling of satisfaction? What is it that compels a reader to revisit and discuss these stories with friends? Frankly, I needed a better answer to give my non-literary acquaintances.

Thanks to my course of study at the University of Oslo, I was introduced to James Phelan's rhetorical theory of narrative. Through his work on the relationship between authors, readers, and texts, I was able to see an approach to literary criticism that could not only divulge the thematic insights that I've always enjoyed analyzing, but also uncover the rhetoric behind them. Phelan clearly maps out techniques and approaches that help identify the different relationships that occur when reading a book, or any fictional narrative for that

matter. In this thesis I have analyzed three works of fiction using Phelan's rhetorical theory of narrative. Each text has been enlightening and enjoyable, offering not only confirmation of some of Phelan's theories but also, sometimes, suggesting extensions of them. In this way, I hope that the analysis that follows will contribute something new to ongoing discussions within narrative theory, and perhaps even offer an answer or two for my non-literary guests.

While I am applying a relatively small branch of the rhetorical theory of narrative to my texts, it is still helpful to break my main focus, or problem statement, into three levels. These insights stem from the textual analysis in the following chapters and, later, will be discussed at length in relation to their textual origins. However, it may be beneficial for my reader to get a glimpse of where this discussion is headed, and what kinds of questions that will be approached. Please be aware that the terminology that now appears will be explained shortly, and that each level follows and interacts with the others, as they, like all things rhetorical, have a recursive relationship.

Part one of my problem statement is that *characters have a role within narrative as tools for ethical rhetoric, and that is something that is both implicit in the mimetic, thematic and synthetic roles they play, yet this role also transcends these categories to become an overt quality in itself. It is this aesthetic role that provokes judgments while also working as a telling function: in essence it is the bridge between the ethical and narratological.* Remember the character of Cinderella; she is mimetic in her representation of a possible girl, thematic in her goodness and fairytale-like manner, synthetic in her place inside a work of fiction. This leaves out a key ingredient that begs to be identified; Cinderella's aesthetic role as a tool for the ethical rhetoric in the story. She is also a character conveying an ethical position of humble servitude, utilizing her ethical position to increase the reader/viewer's hopes for her future, and using disclosure functions to comment on the very foul nature of her guardians.

Part two of my problem statement is that *the ethics of the telling, or the telling functions, work as the aesthetic tools for the implied author to use when guiding the reader into a collaboration with their characters' ethical positions. More importantly, the effects of the telling functions, namely the parameters of expectation and the actual expectations lead the reader into such a collaboration.* In other words, there are elements working in the text that are helping the reader to follow the specific path that the author has created for their reading experience, and that those elements are also giving the reader clues as to where the story is heading.

Finally, part three of my problem statement deals with the ethics of the told. *The character-character relations and the presentation of ethical positions affects the aesthetics as well as the ethics of a story, provoking readerly judgments, thus relying on the progression of the story for comprehension of the ethics, as well as the telling functions themselves.* Or, the way the characters interact and behave throughout a story affects both structure and ethics, and that goes hand in hand with how a reader will digest the story as a whole.

Other questions that will follow after such an inquiry include: what adds the most ‘rhetorical’ weight to a character? Strong telling functions or a vivid ethical position? Finally, I will consider how this may affect our judgments, as we watch the aesthetics of the text and the ethics of the characters work together.

### ***The Texts***

Before diving into the minefield of theory that was just introduced, a look at the literature I have chosen to focus on is necessary. The books in this thesis have significant similarities while stemming from various branches of the genre of contemporary fiction. Starting with Dave Eggers and his collection of short stories, *How We Are Hungry*, we have an American author working in a genre that lends itself readily to study with its concise examples of narrative work. Continuing on with Colum McCann’s *Let the Great World Spin*; the American element is still present as he is an author residing in New York City while writing about New York City, though originally from Ireland. Rounding off this study is Jonathan Franzen, or *Time Magazine*’s “Great American Novelist”<sup>1</sup> and his most recent novel, *Freedom*, which is a social novel portraying an American family, thus solidifying the American link between all of these texts.

Each text revealed some key points upon analysis, and therefore earned its position in my discussion based on its theoretical merits. Beginning with short stories which illustrate some of the more detailed points of Phelan’s theory and then analyzing two different approaches to story-telling in the following two novels enables my research to grow organically with the texts. To begin with the short stories in *How We Are Hungry* is a treat as it is a thoroughly satisfying collection of various narrative techniques. Dave Eggers is perhaps most well-known for his autobiographical, yet promoted as a somewhat fictional work, *A*

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<sup>1</sup> *Time*. Cover page, Aug. 23 2010.

*Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, from 2000. This autobiographical novel first signaled his significant narrative abilities, as he explored many of the different ethical positions that arise when one's parents pass away and one suddenly has to figure out how to raise a younger sibling. This was vividly apparent in the later issues of the book published with a chapter acknowledging the inherent faults within such a personal project titled, "Mistakes We Knew We Were Making." Eggers has since has gone on to write a number of both fiction and nonfiction books, as well as to create a publishing entity called McSweeney's which has an insightful and humorous website with literary content titled *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*. Most importantly, and admittedly one of the reasons I find him so intriguing as a literary figure, is Eggers' involvement in 826 Valencia, a philanthropical venture encouraging writing and publishing amongst inner-city schoolchildren in the United States. What has been called "literary altruism," combined with what one knows about Eggers' background from his autobiographical work, encourages a readership that not only enjoys his stories, but truly wants to see Eggers succeed in his endeavors.<sup>2</sup>

What makes Dave Eggers a valuable author to read and analyze using Phelan's rhetorical theory is his clear and concise prose. In this clarity, the amount of information left unsaid in Eggers' stories is reminiscent of Hemingway's iceberg; though unseen, the presence is sensed and accommodated by the reader. Like Hemingway, Eggers has had some experience writing pieces of journalism and some of this ability for may stem from his work on nonfictional themes, such as Hurricane Katrina in his book *Zeitoun*. In that book, Eggers relates the facts of an Arabic-American family and their struggle to carry through and onward during and after the storm. When conveying nonfictional information and events, Eggers cannot lend a creative twist to the story for his own purposes. He must instead rely on the relevant facts and structure them so that the reader can see the story from his chosen position. It is this very tangible clarity, enhanced by a skillful structure, which comes through to the reader in *How We Are Hungry*. Though the stories are fictional, the characters are revealed as lifelike and believable; encouraging a relationship between Eggers, the reader, and the text.

In contrast to Eggers' short stories, Colum McCann's *Let the Great World Spin* from 2009 presents a fascinating mixture of portraiture and lyric narrative interspersed throughout a novel written in the format of a serial narrative. McCann, born in Ireland in 1965, had a long literary career behind him before the success of *Let the Great World Spin*. He had published a

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<sup>2</sup> See Jane Ganahl's article for an in-depth explanation of Eggers' work at the literacy centers.



number of novels beginning with *Songdogs* in 1996 , as well as *This Side of Brightness*, *Zoli*, and *Dancer*. McCann has also won numerous literary awards both in Ireland and the United States, and his short story “Everything in This Country Must,” was made into a film which was nominated for an Oscar in 2005.

While being interviewed by the National Book Foundation for *Let the Great World Spin*, McCann stated that he “wanted to write a song of my adopted city [...]and maybe to confront some things that were on my mind about issues of faith and recovery and belonging.” This use of New York City proved to be extremely rewarding. Not only did McCann manage to work through and around the theme of 9/11, he did so gracefully. Many authors have broached the subject and come away with varying degrees of scorn from the public. Jonathan Safran Foer wrote *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, which deals directly with the events of that day, and received mixed reviews due to the still fresh memory of the survivors. One reviewer of Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* titled their review on Amazon.com, “Don’t tell me a story I know by heart,”<sup>3</sup> which basically sums up one of the major difficulties faced by authors wishing to approach such loaded subject matter.

Colum McCann seems to skirt around these difficulties in an artistic manner, and with great compassion for his subject. The method he chose to employ was serial narrative, a narrative composed of multiple narrators, following each other in a structurally linear fashion, all contributing to a larger narrative structure. Situated in the context of New York City in the 1970’s, a man is about to cross between the two towers of the World Trade Center on a tightrope, thus intruding into the lives of many, including: Corrigan, an Irish monk dispensing kindness to those whom society has tried to forget, a group of mothers mourning their sons lost in Vietnam, and Tillie, a thirty-eight-year-old prostitute working side-by-side with her daughter.

Serial narratives can vary greatly in their aesthetic form but McCann’s structure is a good representation of the genre and lends itself readily to study as it has what Phelan refers to as “clearly demarcated perspectives” which enable the author to use various narrative techniques within one novel (*Living to Tell* 198). These various elements within the novel’s aesthetic structure offer a fascinating study of the effects of multiple ethical positions within a single story, as well as a look into the factors that contribute to a successful ending.

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<sup>3</sup> Review by “Ellzeena”, on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). November 7, 2010. Web. 23 March 2011.

The third text that I have chosen to look into is Jonathan Franzen's novel *Freedom*, from 2010. Franzen, an American raised in the Midwest, first became a well-known author in the United States with the launch of his second novel *The Corrections* in 2001, for which he famously declined Oprah's offer to feature his novel on her show. The reasoning behind his decision was that the population of viewers would limit the book's appeal to male readers, as Oprah's fans were mostly women. These misgivings and the ensuing controversy were laid to rest when *Freedom* was selected by Oprah last fall with Franzen's blessing.

Jonathan Franzen has been featured very prominently in the media in the last year regarding his latest novel and, as *Time Magazine* put it so bluntly, he is perhaps the most representative novelist there is in the United States at this time. While his novels alone are worth all of the publicity, Franzen also published a collection of essays titled *How to Be Alone* in 2002. The collection features, among other enlightening pieces, his famous essay "Why Bother?" detailing his disappointment in the state of both American society and the future of the social novel. The level of despair is curiously underscored now upon a revisit to the essay; the United States is at war again, novels are still an at-risk group of books, and the media is still bombarding citizens with too much rhetoric. It is then interesting to see how Franzen has stepped up and confronted his fears by writing such compelling stories.

*Freedom*, a social novel like those Franzen fretted over in his essay, revolves around an American family, the Berglunds, and offers the critical reader much fodder for an analysis of rhetoric and ethics. The married couple, Patty and Walter, and their children Joey and Jessica, are depicted over the course of a number of years while their lives spiral into something that was neither planned nor predicted. Throughout the novel there are good people behaving well, good people behaving badly, bad people behaving well and bad people behaving badly. What's more: it's not quite obvious who is good and who is bad. The ethical scenarios and positions in the novel are not unique to *Freedom* and many have been approached via literature before. However, this novel is special in that the aesthetic of the novel guides the reader in such a fashion that, even if the characters are wearing on your nerves and beginning to earn your distrust, the reader still retains a remnant of hope for their wellbeing. This feat is accomplished through an ethical and aesthetic structure which encourages objectivity on the part of the reader, and at the same time pulls them further into the ambiguous story world.

At this point it is fruitful to look into the theoretical aspect of this thesis. While I draw heavily from James Phelan's rhetorical theory of narrative, it will be a comfort to the reader to know that the main body of this thesis is comprised of textual analyses. Any theoretical insights that are involved are coming from within the texts, as that is the best approach for this format of research. More information regarding the importance of textual analysis in this thesis will be detailed in the *Method* section shortly.

### ***Theory: James Phelan and the rhetorical theory of narrative***

It is vital that there is great clarity regarding the theory I have adhered to, as well as the terms I use throughout my discussion and their roots in the community of narrative theory. My main theoretical texts are from James Phelan and therefore he is also the source of most of my terms. I find that Phelan, with his over 30 years of work in the field of narrative theory, and as editor of *Narrative*, a leading journal of narrative theory published at Ohio State University, has an established reputation as a careful and diligent researcher. Phelan also has an extraordinary knack for simplicity when detailing the various elements of theory which comprise this field of research, and this is something that I would like to borrow to lend clarity to my own process. That is why there are some terms of Phelan's that I will define here before using them throughout my discussion. I will also detail my own particular uses of certain terms when they stray towards other theoreticians and lines of thought, such as Wayne C. Booth and Peter J. Rabinowitz, before outlining the theoretical work that I have developed which branches away from these scholars.

James Phelan's "rhetorical theory of narrative" is where the roots of my theoretical work are grounded. This theory stems from the assumption that a narrative is comprised of "somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened" (*Experiencing Fiction* 3). Phelan goes on to explain that in a fictional narrative, such as those analyzed in this thesis, "the rhetorical situation is doubled: the narrator tells her story to her narratee for her purposes, while the author communicates to her audience for her own purposes both that story and the narrator's telling of it" (*Experiencing Fiction* 3-4). This is a fascinating position for a critical approach because it breaks the narrative act down into a tripartite relationship which can be easily applied by newcomers to narratology, and which enables serious inquiry to take place regarding the "purpose" of narrative acts. In other words, it really invites a look into the motivations and ethics behind any given narrative.

The rhetorical theory of narrative also relies upon “the recursive relationship” between the author, text, and reader. This is one of the key principles of this theory and lays much of the foundation for further theoretical assumptions as the dynamics of such a relationship function as a “feedback loop” (*Experiencing Fiction* 4). Because of the interconnectedness of this loop, “the rhetorical critic may begin the interpretive inquiry from any one of these points on the rhetorical triangle, but the inquiry will necessarily consider how each point both influences and can be influenced by the other two” (*Experiencing Fiction* 5). This approach appeals to me as it offers a complete approach to narrative that encompasses all of the elements present. After all, a story only comes alive when someone is reading it.

It is that ‘someone’ I am referring to when I use the terms ‘authorial audience’ and ‘reader’ interchangeably. It is Phelan’s model of the audience, which he has borrowed heavily from Peter J. Rabinowitz that I utilize and imply in these pages. The most important feature of this model, that which makes it most attractive for a research project concerning elements of empathy, is the underlying desire of a reader to become a part of the authorial audience (*Experiencing Fiction* 4). The term ‘authorial audience’ is helpfully defined in Phelan’s and Rabinowitz’s *Companion to Narrative Theory* as “the hypothetical ideal audience for whom the author constructs the text and who understands it perfectly” (543). Without such a desire present within the reader, the ensuing recursive relationship would be too weak and there would be no argument for the collaboration between the author, reader and text. Questions of empathy would thus be moot.

Perhaps the term used most exuberantly throughout this thesis, and yet slightly problematic is “function.” I will give you a definition of this term from James Phelan, but first it begs to be clarified that this is the sort of term over which theoreticians get into heated debates. When Phelan was cornered for a definition of “dynamics” at the Narrative Ethics conference in Oslo last November, he was unable to provide one that satisfied J. Hillis Miller or a number of other scholars in the room. What he did answer with was a general appeal; “The experience of reading is temporal, so what’s the *motor* of a narrative?”<sup>4</sup> For me, as a lowly Master’s student, it was not an option to volunteer the idea of functions as motors on that occasion. So here, in the quiet of my thesis, I present what he has written of the term “function” in the past while attempting to explain how I see its relation to other tricky terms like “dynamics.”

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<sup>4</sup> This quote is from my own transcription of the lecture on 20 November, 2010.

In *Reading People, Reading Plots*, Phelan states that “a function is a particular application of that attribute made by the text through its developing structure” (9). This does feel a bit vague but my interpretation sees it as something along the lines of: a function is how an element of the text can be used. The reason I have chosen to see it this way is that perhaps simplicity really is the key here? When Phelan was speaking of dynamics as a sort of “motor of a narrative” I could easily see the link to the functions. The functions are where the words within the text are performing specific tasks that achieve specific goals. This is because of the widely recognized fact that how a narrator tells us something has relevance to what a narrator is telling us. When Hemingway is telling the story of Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*, he is using the functions of the words to convey more than just dialogue and events. When he relies on such a stripped down prose and the reader is still able to walk away with a vivid picture of post-war Spain, as well as judgments regarding Jake’s relationship with Brett Ashley, something is at work. It is through this dignity of prose achieved through careful omission that Hemingway excelled at and which, I argue, would not be possible if words in a narrative did not have functions.

Hopefully the discussion of functions as motors within narratives will become evident through the examples of its application in these pages. Now we must move on to another recurring term that requires explanation: ‘ethics.’ James Phelan outlines a number of theses regarding ethics in *Experiencing Fiction*, one of which reads:

...individual narratives explicitly or more often implicitly establish their own ethical standards in order to guide their audiences to particular ethical judgments. Consequently, within rhetorical ethics, narrative judgments proceed from the inside out rather than the outside in. It is for this reason they are closely tied to aesthetic judgments. (10)

In Phelan’s point, there is an explanation of ethics that corresponds to one of three “tendencies” identified by Liesbeth Korthals Altes in her definition of the “ethical turn” in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. Altes argues that approaches to ethical criticism can be looped into three categories: “(1) pragmatist and rhetorical ethics; (2) ethics of alterity; (3) political approaches to ethics” (143). Phelan’s approach is linked to the first category in its focus on “rhetorical devices responsible for the contradictory pattern of desires which narratives impose upon their readers” (143). Perhaps the most important point Altes makes regarding Phelan is her acknowledgment that while moral questions may arise in ethical criticism, they will not be “prefabricated,” thus leaving room for “a fruitful approach to the ethical dimension of the aesthetic form” (144).

Here, the definition of ‘ethics’ that I adhere to is identical to the one stated above. Before placing my theory firmly in that camp I did look at the other two approaches to ethics that Altes discusses: the ethics of alterity and political approaches to ethics. While political approaches were completely out of the question for myself as the can of worms that would be opened could not be contained in a Master’s thesis, I did look into the ethics of alterity. I found that such ethics, regarding deconstruction as necessary and distrust of texts as plausible, were not in my nature as a critic. This was quite interesting for me as it pointed to an often unacknowledged feature of criticism, yet one that surfaces when dealing with ethics: a critic’s choice of theoretical approach will mirror their own sensibilities to a certain extent. I am neither a Marxist, nor a deconstructionist, and while both of those schools of thought affect my view of literature, I will not use their definitions of ethics as my own.

Altes’ helpful discussion of the ethical turn in literature can be summarized in one statement she includes towards the end of her ‘open questions’ segment: “There is no such thing as ‘the’ ethics of a text, only various ethical readings” (145). This, while oversimplified, is a component of the definition of ethics as it is used in this thesis, as well as the method I employ to analyze my texts. Now moving further into Phelan’s ethics, I have explored what he refers to as the “ethics of the told” and “ethics of the telling” (*Experiencing Fiction* 11). Here, we now approach the two main categories of his rhetorical theory that this thesis will focus on and will be referred to throughout these pages. The ethics of the told are defined as “the character-character relations” while the ethics of the telling are defined as “the narrator’s relation to the characters, the task of narrating, and to the audience; and the implied author’s relation to these things” (*Experiencing Fiction* 11). These are part of the four ethical positions Phelan identifies through the course of his work, both in *Living to Tell About It* as well as *Experiencing Fiction*. Yet one of the ethical relations that is of prime importance to our understanding of the link between the texts, the readers, and the authors is that of “the ethics of rhetorical purpose” which is, as Phelan clearly defines, “the ethical dimension of the overall narrative act” (*Experiencing Fiction* 11). All of these positions and relations are interconnected and sometimes serve similar purposes, all depending on what ends the author is pursuing. Therefore, I will try to clarify from which point I am beginning my argument when utilizing these terms, as they appear in my work.

The ethics of the told are relatively easily understood, as they pertain mainly to the ethical positions of the characters in relation to each other and their story world. Later in this thesis, specific positions and complications will be detailed when relevant to textual analysis.

However, within the ethics of the telling, a large portion of my discussion relies on a clear understanding from the very beginning of what Phelan refers to as various “telling functions”: “narrator functions” as well as “disclosure functions” being two variations that both Phelan and I find valuable for a rhetorical approach to a story. Narrator functions are defined as “Along the narrator-narratee track, the narrator acts as reporter, interpreter, and evaluator of the narrated for the narratee, and those actions are constrained by the narrative situation” (*Living to Tell* 12). Disclosure functions are defined as “Along the narrator-authorial audience track, the narrator unwittingly reports information of all kinds to the authorial audience” (*Living to Tell* 12). Phelan also defines these two sets of functions as separate entities from the “character functions” that relate to the thematic, mimetic and synthetic features of characters and character narrators (*Living to Tell* 12-13). This is important to keep in mind when assessing the aesthetic elements and the ethical elements of a narrative, as it is easy to let character functions interfere with an assessment of telling functions if one is not careful. In a moment I will expand on what I find helpful and what I find problematic with these definitions when applied to fictional narrative, and, most importantly for this thesis, their effects on the texts.

The final idea that I would like to borrow from Phelan is his concept of the rhetorically rewarding conclusion. This concept is most adequately demonstrated in Phelan’s chapter, “Progressing Toward Surprise: Edith Wharton’s ‘Roman Fever’” (*Experiencing Fiction* 95-108). In that work, Phelan argues that Wharton’s story is successful in its surprise ending because it builds upon a collaboration of sorts between Wharton, the narrator, and the reader: a collaboration built upon the ethics and the aesthetic of the story working together. The success in such an ending is stemming from the rhetoric that is present throughout the narrative, thus lending it believability and power when delivered. Phelan explains, “Our sense of completion also includes our final understanding of the ethical relations between the characters” (*Experiencing Fiction* 107). It is this sort of successful completion that I appraise in a number of my textual analyses, though it is important to acknowledge that Phelan’s definition of a rewarding conclusion can be seen as limited as it sometimes fails to accommodate some of the more modern, open endings seen in recent literary work.

### ***Theory: Effects originating from Phelan's theory and their potential applications***

The basis of the following theoretical work and correlating case studies is firmly rooted in two points I would like to make clear here, before going into more detail in the subsequent chapters. First, narrator functions and disclosure functions can, and most often do work together, yet they can serve independent purposes that reach different conclusions. Second, I would like to introduce two terms that can identify the effects of the telling functions: *parameters of expectation* and *actual expectation*.

The first point, that the narrator functions are working together with the disclosure functions, is not surprising in itself, yet, as we will see in the first story, each continues serving an independent purpose and reaches a different conclusion: narrator functions are giving us what we need to know (reporting the nuts and bolts of the story per se), while the disclosure functions are giving us what we need to remember in order to make a judgment at the end of the story (moments of thematic insight and alternative information to consider than what is reported primarily by the narrator). The different conclusions reached by the narrator functions versus the disclosure functions would then be: 'Rita climbs a mountain with a degree of success' versus 'Rita is partially responsible for the deaths of porters on a mountain she didn't really want to climb in the first place.' These are not contradictory conclusions yet they are two extremely different stories. What makes these telling functions work together is the reader who is able to discern the implications of the reporting through the narrator functions, and the prompting of the disclosure functions.

This line of thought branches out and away from Phelan's definition of telling functions in my attempt to define the *effects of functions*. While Phelan sufficiently defines the different purposes of the telling functions, it is interesting for us to move further into the effects as that is where the link between the text and the reader's judgments resides. In other words, the effects reside in the gap between the narrative and what is going on within it, and the reader's response to said narrative. It will be seen in the first story analyzed, as well as in the others, that the narrator functions serve the purpose of causing what I would call *parameters of expectation*, or narrator- and reader-defined boundaries for the story world and its inhabitants. When the narrator does a sufficient job in establishing the parameters of expectation for their story, the reader is likely to be able to follow along and enjoy any surprises or complications that may arise, as they will adhere to these inherent boundaries that were already established. The opposite of this would be true if a narrator failed to report



adequately on their story world and its inhabitants, prompting the discerning reader's dismay or disbelief when introducing new plot elements or complications. Phelan illustrates this point adequately in his article on "Roman Fever" by Edith Wharton, however never labels the effects of such authorial guidance with any particular terms.<sup>5</sup>

My term does however echo, yet only in a minor fashion, Wayne C. Booth's "conventional expectations" and "promised qualities" which are two of his categories of "Types of Literary Interest (and Distance)" (*Rhetoric of Fiction* 125-28). Booth sees the three sets of values that hold a reader's interest as pertaining to the intellectual, the qualitative, and the practical, with "conventional expectations" and "promised qualities" forming two subsets of the qualitative branch (127). Booth's conventional expectations, as a term, merely identifies the fact that, "For experienced readers a sonnet begun calls for a sonnet concluded" (127). His "promised qualities" on the other hand does hit a little closer to my mark, yet still doesn't ring true as an effect of a narrator function in its definition: "...each work promises in its early pages a further provision of distinctive qualities exhibited in those pages" (128). In other words, Booth sees "conventional expectations" as an element of readerly notice and not as an effect of a function, as well as "promised qualities" as "an implied promise" of the continuation of certain features. Both of these terms differ from *parameters of expectation* because of the innate service of my term to the narrator functions, and the lack of commitment to a certain 'promised' or 'conventional' theme (or format) that it allows. *Parameters of expectation* are an effect of narrator functions and thus cannot be derived from thematic insights or stylistic qualities as Booth's terms can. This, from my point of view, while making my term a broader and more inclusive element, also allows it to be applied more readily across different narrative formats.

Continuing this line of reasoning, I argue that the disclosure functions prompt an *actual expectation*, or reader-defined hopes and beliefs regarding the story world and its inhabitants. While the narrator functions give the reader *parameters of expectation* that help to limit the possibilities within the story to a capacity that is formidable yet something that the reader can grasp, the disclosure functions deliver the true effects. They are the tools that work to ignite ideas and hopes for the story world in the reader's mind. These ideas and hopes, the reader's *actual expectations*, are based in the ethics of the story as much as they based in the

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<sup>5</sup> He does refer to the "ethics of surprise" in that article and their relation to rewarding conclusions.

ethics of the reader. This makes them a very changeable and difficult entity to predict on the part of the author, yet it is still an entity and tool which he must rely upon.<sup>6</sup>

In order to clarify my assertions regarding the role of characters and telling functions it is necessary to further expand on the *effects of functions*. I include here a graph detailing Phelan's telling functions and then displaying what I see to be their result. As is shown in the graph, not only do I address the effects on the reader's *parameters of expectation*, and *actual expectations*, but thematic and mimetic properties of the story are also included as effects of the telling functions. The thematic and mimetic help to display a clear path towards understanding the effects, along with the synthetic, here categorized as inherent to the telling functions in the story world.

	Telling Functions According to Phelan	
Narrator Functions		Disclosure Functions
Narrator → Narratee		Narrator → Authorial Audience
↓	Effects of Telling Functions	↓
Parameters of Expectation		Actual Expectations
Themes		Thematic Insights
Reports		Initial Judgments

These definitions of the effects of the telling functions are mainly focused on the reader's experience of the story, yet have consequences throughout the rhetorical model.<sup>7</sup> As the author constructs the story, he or she must be aware of the effects his story will have on a reader as the presumed desire is to have a collaborative relationship with a reader when crafting fiction or otherwise. One of the problematic elements of Phelan's definition of disclosure functions is that he states that "the narrator unwittingly reports information of all kinds to the authorial audience" (*Living to Tell* 12). To claim that the narrator is "unwittingly" performing such a central task to our understanding of the story we're reading is, in my mind, too simple. This is further complicated by Phelan's definition of "telling functions" in the

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<sup>6</sup> Booth's insightful chapter regarding "Emotions, Beliefs, and the Reader's Objectivity" in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* has a number of timeless insights to offer in respect to readers' beliefs and their interaction with the author's set of values (137-47). This theme will be revisited in Chapter Four.

<sup>7</sup> As stated earlier, this refers to the "recursive relationship" between the author, the text, and the reader (*Experiencing Fiction* 4).

glossary at the end of the same publication, in which he defines disclosure functions as “the track between the implied author and the authorial audience” (218). The implication here is clear: the narrator and the implied author are sharing the duty of disclosure, so how can there be a claim of “unwittingly” disclosing information? Even if the narrator is unaware of an audience, that is still a shaky claim due to the mere fact that a narrator stems from an entity that *is* aware of the audience, namely the implied author who has presumably structured their writing to serve a rhetorical purpose. In assessing the effects of the telling functions, we assert that there is an implicit responsibility in the distribution of reporting and disclosing, and that the act of telling by a character or other narrator is bound together with the aesthetic of the story, thus with the ethical effects as well.

Phelan does not expand on the properties that stem from the telling functions as he only addressed them as correlating to “character functions,” which he describes as “the ways in which characters work as representations of possible people [...], as representative of larger groups or ideas [...], and as artificial constructs within the larger construct of the work” (*Living to Tell* 12-13). I agree with Phelan’s definition of character functions; however, I posit that characters can serve as more than just representations of the mimetic, thematic and synthetic.

### ***Method: texts as theoretical greenhouses***

There is arguably a fair amount of theory in this thesis, and a number of extensions I would like to make to James Phelan’s rhetorical theory of narrative. What needs to be made clear here is that the method by which I hope to achieve these ends is firmly based within the texts themselves. By analyzing the three books, and holding them up individually to the scrutiny of Phelan’s approach, I will, first, see if the theory can withstand application, and only then will I begin to search for any extensions or even contradictions to that theory. The importance of basing my work on what the texts offer through analysis cannot be overstated. This is because it would be remiss to make great claims revolving around narrative theory when only approaching three texts, as well as the simple matter of this being a thesis of a hundred or so pages. My method can therefore be summarized thus: the texts are the greenhouses in which the theory may take root and grow. Without the texts and their specific qualities as fictional works, there is no possibility for my theoretical work to evolve.

In each chapter I will study and analyze one of my chosen texts using Phelan's rhetorical theory of narrative. Then, I will look to identify any possible extensions or contradictions of Phelan's theoretical work that may surface through such an analysis. It is therefore within those extensions and contradictions that my problem statement is based. This method will hopefully result in a diligent study of the texts at hand, as well as a small contribution to the larger theory as developed by Phelan.

When approaching each of the texts, it is my assertion that each one guides the reader towards the most helpful analytical approach, and that that is part of the aesthetic direction of narratives. By aesthetic direction, I mean the implicit guidance found in a narrative, or those elements that show the reader the path of understanding, whether it is emphasis on the characters or on the structure of the story. That is not to say that one should always follow an author's guidance when reading their work critically, or even that all readers will interpret a text's aesthetic direction in the same manner. It is equally fruitful, at times, to approach a text from an unexpected theoretical vantage point, and I would be remiss to claim otherwise. However, in the case of this thesis, I have attempted to let the texts guide the analysis in order to see what the rhetorical purpose for such guidance was aiming to achieve. I consider the rhetorical purpose as the driving motive behind narrative, implied as such by Phelan in *Experiencing Fiction*: "In fictional narrative, the rhetorical situation is doubled: the narrator tells her story to her narratee for her purposes, while the author communicates to her audience for her own purposes both that story and the narrator's telling of it" (3-4).

The final interesting feature of my method of inquiry is the simple fact that the theory is applied to three varying forms of fictional text. While the short stories and novels are different in form, and some would argue genre, they all share the important rhetorical qualities found in fictional narratives. Any insights gained from a cross-genre inquiry are, in my mind, more easily applicable to other forms of narrative as well. This should also underscore the link between my method and the purpose of this thesis; an identification of theoretical points that are present in the texts being examined, in order to add to a larger discussion of narrative theory.

### *Specification of Problem Statement*

Looking back on my problem statements on pages five and six, it is possible to wonder if all of the theory that was just detailed can really be encapsulated into such a simple realm of questioning. The short answer is a hopeful yes. Given the basic tools developed by James Phelan, it is possible to approach each text with the intent to discover what types of functions are being used and how successful the rhetoric of an individual text can be to an individual reader.

The first part of my problem statement, concerning characters and their aesthetic role as a tool for ethical rhetoric, is the best place to start when attempting to clarify the central aims of this thesis. After reading the texts, each seems to be utilizing their characters to different ends and in different ways, in order to accomplish different purposes. If it is possible to prove that a character can be put in the position of an ethical tool, there are some questions that arise. Namely, how is that happening and what are the consequences for everyone in the rhetorical relationship between author, text, and reader? To answer that question, an analysis of the character's presentation and utilization within the story can be helpful. That is accomplished by looking at the telling functions and the disclosure functions, as well as the basic ethical attributes that are on the surface of the discourse.

Then, when it is possible to find an example of a character in our text being used as an ethical tool, what sorts of techniques are used by authors to better their results within the boundaries of literary rhetoric? Put a different way, what kinds of literary devices work best with a character that is also performing an important aesthetic and ethical role? None of these are simple questions.

This leads to the second part of my problem statement, which concerns the ethics of the telling. Once we submerge ourselves into all of these functions and their roles in the texts, exactly how are they doing the author's bidding? Are the effects of the telling functions, namely the parameters of expectation and the actual expectations, leading the reader into a more fruitful relationship with the text and the author? A close analysis of the functions within each of my texts yields interesting results; these functions do not always work together, yet they seem to achieve a symbiosis that results in a helpful map for both the reader and the author.

Finally, the third part of my problem statement, regarding the ethics of the told, is another branch of the same argument, though it moves away from the identification of functions and towards the realm of ethics. Put simply, by analyzing the ethics of the characters, as they relate to each other as well as the reader, an impact on the aesthetic nature of the story can occur. What it is that occurs in each of the three texts studied here varies, yet gives some interesting food for thought as well. One feature of this ethical impact is that it affects the progression of some of the stories, or even, one could say, the structure. A look into how this can occur, as well as when it is used, can potentially reveal some compelling traits present in these texts.

All three parts of my problem statement refer to each other to an extent that it would feel like a failure to avoid one section, or to favor one over the other. However, the questions posed here can only be answered to the extent that there is relevant evidence present in the texts being examined. A more thorough study would have multiple examples for each claim, not merely one. That said, the goal here is to ask potentially interesting questions, apply potentially helpful theory, and see if the texts under consideration can lead us to new insights. Hopefully that is the case.

### ***Outline of the Following Chapters***

Each of the following chapters will deal with the various elements of my problem statement, as they appear in the texts. To be more specific, chapter two will discuss both the ethics of the telling and the told while identifying the aesthetic and ethical roles of the characters in Dave Eggers' short stories. The two stories analyzed in the first chapter each illustrate particular points regarding the ethics of the telling and then the ethics of told, both of which will be explained at length later in this introduction. The stories are "Up the Mountain Coming Down Slowly" and "She Waits, Seething, Blooming," both of which have female protagonists confronting daunting tasks; climbing a mountain and confronting a teenage son, respectively. The key difference between the two short stories is the presentation of the ethics. "Up the Mountain" demonstrates the ethics of the telling in a manner that requires the reader to pay attention to the disclosure functions (things perceived by the narrator, yet gone unreported, unevaluated, and un-interpreted) in order to comprehend the ethical positions of the characters in the story. "She Waits" is a much more direct example of ethical positions being presented outright, without so much reliance on either the narrator's report or the disclosure functions to

coach the reader into an understanding. Due to the brevity of “She Waits” at a little over one page, it is helpful that the ethical position of the protagonist is delivered in the first line of the story and evolves from there. This offers an interesting study of ethical positions as they evolve via the progression of the story, without so much reliance on the nuances of the narrator’s telling.

Chapter three will deal exclusively with the ethics of the telling in relation to the characters. *Let the Great World Spin* is the text that is discussed, and within it a number of questions can be resolved regarding the telling functions; how narrator functions and disclosure functions work together to add to the distinct ethical positions of the various character narrators. The section regarding lyric narrative is especially vital to understanding the true force of telling functions on ethics, and, ultimately, the empathy of the reader for the characters in Colum McCann’s serial narrative.

While chapter four will round off the discussion with an analysis of the ethics of the told pertaining to Jonathan Franzen’s *Freedom*. The characters are a mixed bag of ethical positions yet the most exciting aspect for our inquiry resides in the aesthetic presentation of these ethics. In other words, where and how each ethical position is revealed is just as relevant to our inquiry as what sort of position is revealed. This can be applied to the problem statements in a number of ways; most importantly as an example of the bridge between the ethical and the aesthetic.

In reaching the conclusion of this thesis, issues of empathy and the ‘rhetorical’ weight of characters become forefront. The ethics of the telling versus the ethics of the told, after being applied to the multiple examples of narrative, should begin to offer some examples of effects. While a number of questions will be raised, concluding points regarding both the texts and the theoretical extensions from Phelan’s work will be underscored here. With any luck there will be supporting evidence for the identification of a new role within narrative ethics and aesthetics.

## CHAPTER TWO: TWO STORIES, TWO APPROACHES TO NARRATIVE ETHICS

### *How We Are Hungry* by Dave Eggers

In his compelling collection of short stories, *How We Are Hungry*, from 2004, Dave Eggers explores numerous themes while stretching the boundaries of short fiction within the traditional story format as well as within experimental models. The collection really embodies what Bharat Tandon describes, in his review of the same work, as, “One of the proverbial asymmetries of short stories is that any attention-deficits in a narrator are likely to prompt that much more attention from the reader” (21). It is this level of attention that is necessary and yet so rewarding when reading Egger’s short stories: it enables a critic to have a clear view into what narrator functions *can* do and what disclosure functions *must* do in order for a short story to work.

The two stories that will be examined here are of the former, more traditional type, as I believe they offer a number of insights in a comprehensive manner. “Up the Mountain Coming Down Slowly” is the longest of the short stories in the collection and follows a clear narrative progression to an ending that is both surprising, yet expected. “She Waits, Seething, Blooming” is one of the shortest stories in the book and also has the necessary narrative progression that pulls a reader into its story world; however, it relies upon ethical positions more than telling functions to accomplish this goal. Reading two different stories while taking cues from within them concerning which of the two analytical strategies to utilize, (an analysis of the ethics of the telling, or telling functions, versus an analysis of the ethics of the told, or ethical positions), it is possible to identify various factors which contribute to the readerly judgments that stem from these narratives.

In “Up the Mountain Coming Down Slowly” the character Rita and her climb to the summit of Mt. Kilimanjaro are the subjects that encourage a close study of narrator functions versus disclosure functions. After identifying these functions in the text it is possible to see their effects on the progression, configuration, and completion of the story.<sup>8</sup> By defining those effects it is possible to see that the collaboration between the functions yields an interesting point: each function has its own individual purpose within the text, and, in Eggers’ story,

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<sup>8</sup> Terms regarding the various segments of narrative (such as progression, completion, etc) are drawn from James Phelan’s helpful model (*Experiencing Fiction* 21) and when used in explicit detail, will be cited accordingly.



those purposes can be seen to contradict each other. The consequences of this analysis can be seen when the readerly judgments are assessed. Judgments, while serving as a necessary part of the reader's response to a text, can implicitly help identify the effects of the telling functions as well as serve as markers for the ethical rhetoric within the text. All of this will contribute to a study of telling functions that have a second purpose beyond merely reporting and disclosing information; namely as aesthetic devices or ethical tools.

"She Waits, Seething, Blooming" is a portraiture of an unnamed protagonist; a single mother waiting for her teenage son to come home from a late night out. This story is brief at only a little over a page, yet clearly demonstrates ethical positions as well as an aesthetic temporal element that leads the reader to make their judgments. What makes this story so interesting is the prevalence of the ethics within the story over the narrator functions and disclosure functions. It is perhaps the inverse of the first story, in that here we can see the ethics before the functions, as opposed to the functions delivering the ethics. The reader encounters the ethical position(s) of the main character immediately and is thus guided by them throughout the story. Due to the temporal pacing of the introduction and the story as a whole, there is simply no time for the effects of disclosure functions to sink into the reader's judgments when already confronted with such an effective presentation of the character's ethics. "She Waits" is a compelling introduction to both the effects of ethical positions and aesthetic devices, as well as a glance at the specific qualities of portraiture that lend it to a gratifying study of narrative ethics.

Both of these stories add to the ongoing discussion of points in my problem statement. Because each of Egger's stories has a unique approach to the revelation of character and events, it is possible to see a number of interesting places in the texts where the ethical and the aesthetic roles of characters are revealed. The textual evidence, seen through Phelan's analytical approaches, then gives us a great deal more to work with in regard to my problem statements. This is important because it is not my intent to make general narrative claims. Instead, I hope that these stories show evidence and, perhaps, extensions to Phelan's theories; extensions that circle back to the problem statements named in the Introduction.

**“Up the Mountain Coming Down Slowly”: *The Ethics of the Telling, or, Narrator Functions vs. Disclosure Functions***

Eggers’ story, which, when reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement* was said to be “patrolling what lies on and beyond the far edges of speech and thought,” has many interesting components, as both the content and the structure are extremely compelling for a scholar (Tandon 21). With such encouraging reviews, it seemed a natural place to look for the ethics of the telling; for if you are on the edge of speech and thought, what are you using to tell the story? The main subject is Rita who is on a trip to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro, which climbing then serves as the main event. While hiking up the mountain, Rita witnesses the struggle of her fellow companions, as well as the day-to-day occupations of the porters who carry the equipment for the “paying hikers” (174). When Rita, in the midst of altitude sickness, witnesses men carrying bags holding bodies back down the mountain, she fails to ascertain her own role in their demise. However, at the end of the story, Rita comes to terms with her involvement in the enterprise of climbing Kilimanjaro and what effects that has on the world around her. The skill with which Eggers describes Rita’s background, motivation, and character, as well as her ascent/descent from the mountain makes it a gratifying task to look closely at the layers of telling (both reporting and disclosing) the story has to offer us and to appraise what sorts of effects those telling functions set into action, as well as the readerly judgments that occur.

Proceeding with this story, first, we begin with an appraisal of the ethics of telling through a careful look at the narrator functions and the disclosure functions within the text. Two important points do surface in this analysis: (1) disclosure functions can work as prominent tools for the progression within a story, and (2) narrators and characters share aesthetic and ethical responsibilities that are underscored by the telling functions. Finally, we can see if “Up the Mountain,” and the points it has raised, have anything to add to the problem statements from earlier.

From the very beginning of the story, the narrator functions are apparent in the reporting, interpreting, and evaluating of the protagonist’s every move and decision after her arrival in Tanzania. Rita, according to the narrator’s report, is a woman who never went to a bar alone and could never witness a death as she would then be forced to sit and “hum songs about candy” (142). While she worries over her decision to come on the hike alone she frets over her fate as well as altitude sickness, “The young were more susceptible, she’d heard, and

at thirty-eight she was not sure she was that anymore – young – but she felt that for some reason she in particular was always susceptible and she would have to know when to turn back” (144). Later in the story the narrator explains Rita’s recent loss of two children whom she had hoped to adopt, “People were always quietly taking things from her, always with the understanding that everyone would be better off if Rita’s life were kept simplified” (154).

Such an omniscient report of a woman’s internal and external existence shows a clearly observable use of narrator functions within the story. Rita is presented, evaluated, and interpreted in rather objective tones, leaving little doubt in the mind of the reader as to whom their protagonist really is. As each side of Rita’s personality is visited by the narrator, a new window of insight into her capacity as protagonist is opened. As the group begins their first day of hiking at a rather slow pace, Rita’s reflections are revealed: “And now it is boring; here in Tanzania, she is bored. She will die of a crushing monotony before she even has a chance at a high-altitude cerebral edema” (157).

Lest we lose sympathy for an impatient hiker, the narrator then describes Rita as wanting to be seen as worthy of the tasks she tries to accomplish, “She wants Grant [a fellow hiker] to like her, and to feel that she is more like him – quick, learned, seasoned – at least more so than the others, who are all so delicate, needy, and slow” (159). Though it turns out that Rita also has a problem finishing things she starts:

For so many years she has been doing everything within her power to finish but again and again she has pulled up short, and has been content for having tried. She found comfort in the nuances between success and failure, between a goal finished, accomplished, and a goal adjusted. (191)

All of the above revelations concerning Rita are examples of the narrator’s reporting of details about Rita’s life: clear and helpful evaluations of the main character, giving the reader what I referred to earlier as the *parameters of expectation* for the course Rita’s character will most likely follow. She will try to climb the mountain. She may change her mind and turn back. She will try and be a desirable sort of hiker, one who is neither needy nor susceptible, but she is aware of her past failures. The narrator reports the possibility of death, failure, or unexpected success, and while all of these reports become not only parameters of

expectation they also become themes, as well as the kindling that ignites initial judgments by the reader.<sup>9</sup>

Before moving on to the disclosure functions in Eggers' story it is important to note that Phelan connects the mimetic components of the character to the thematic components of the character and while it is an interesting discussion, it is unnecessary to repeat it here.<sup>10</sup> What is important to state once again, and a point that he and I most likely agree upon wholeheartedly, is the interdependence of the two components in regard to telling functions and their effects. A character's possible self and what they can possibly represent thematically are key components to a story, ethically and aesthetically coming to the surface over time. This discussion presented by Phelan is extremely vital in understanding the effects of the interdependence of the mimetic and the thematic, and helps to illustrate how they, for example, would affect Rita's character. Namely, that through the reporting of the mimetic, the thematic can be seen in the disclosure functions and their subsequent implications. This point is further clarified as we move the focus of our analysis from the narrator functions to the disclosure functions.

Returning to Eggers' story, looking once again at Rita as a character, there is a different and I would claim more compelling element to the narrative if one takes the disclosure functions into account. Rita evolves into more than a woman on a quest to finish a hike. She becomes a questionable entity that gives the story a focal point riddled with instabilities. Subsequently, through the implication of her unstable ethos, the unearthing of Rita's true character and the theme of responsibility in the story is possible.<sup>11</sup> An assessment of Rita's interactions with the porters as she attempts to be a pleasant customer can highlight some of the *actual expectations* that come to the surface of the narrative.

When Rita decides at one point to give her shoes to a young man when she is finished with her hike, as he does not have proper boots for such a lengthy climb, an *actual expectation* arises as the reader contemplates the potential Rita has for following through with

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<sup>9</sup> As mentioned in Chapter One, when addressing the relationship between the reader's judgments versus the more technical interpretation of the narrative, it is important to keep in mind the variety of responses and judgments any reader may present. One of the more helpful aspects of *parameters of expectation* as a term of inquiry is that it helps to establish a point between the text and the judgments, where these effects can lay without being colored by either the narrator or the reader. It is when we move on to the disclosure functions and the subsequent *actual expectations* that the relationship between the interpretation of the narrative and the reader's judgments becomes forefront with all of its complications for ethical and aesthetical inquiry.

<sup>10</sup> *Reading People, Reading Plots* 10-13.

<sup>11</sup> For an interesting account of the link between ethos and its effects on narrative see Amossy.

her idea. Almost immediately after this moment of charitable emotion, things are placed in the rough context of the mountain, as the group is told that there is a pecking order among the porters and they must only give items to Frank, the head porter as he would dispense them appropriately. This quick turnaround in the rules of charity, as reported via the narrator, has consequences for the disclosure function's *actual expectation*, in that it quickly sows doubt into Rita's ability to follow through with her intentions.

Later, Rita witnesses the leftovers from one breakfast being dumped into a tub and "The young porters descend upon it, stabbing their cups into the small mound of porridge until it's gone in seconds" (185). Here, the *parameters of expectation* regarding the well-being of the porters are set to encapsulate their hunger, while the inherent hopelessness of their situation is conveyed by the connotations of the word "stabbing" as they fight for remains. Those connotations are the disclosure functions at work. This is also illustrated when Rita observes "...about twenty porters around the dining tent, though only three are carrying dishes away. With the tent empty, two more are breaking down the card table and chairs. The tent is soon empty and the porters begin filing in, intending, Rita assumes, to clean it before disassembling it" (189-190). Thus, when two young porters die in the night, after sleeping in the freezing and leaking mess tent, Rita is forced to face what she had known all along, as well as the reader with their *actual expectations*: the knowledge that by simply being a part of the local machinery of Kilimanjaro, she had in some way contributed to the demise of those young men.

However, this knowledge is something she fails to confront until she has summited the mountain. Technically, via what the narrator reports, Rita is not responsible for the deaths (she was asleep when they occurred), yet it is all too obvious to both Rita and the reader, through the disclosure functions of the discourse, that she had a role to play in the men's demise. Without the disclosure functions, acknowledgment of Rita's role in the deaths of the porters, and her true feelings regarding her personal choices would not be as apparent. (It is important to note that this is the point where the ethics of the story begin to appear, though that particular discussion must wait a bit for our purposes.)

Returning to the theme of responsibility, it is most apparent in the fabric of the story where the disclosure functions come into the light, where the narrator reports one thing, yet implies another. Rita has been responsible for children in the past, but never adopted them. Rita began a 10K run, but never finished. The leap from the description of Rita as she has

been in the past, forward to what Rita is in the process of accomplishing in the story, is short, yet vital to our understanding of the disclosure function. It is in the space between the two that the implications of her character's choices are disclosed. Thus the disclosure functions are subtly hinting that what the narrator functions are reporting and guiding the reader towards may potentially not occur. Even though according to the narrator functions Rita "cannot grip how this will work" (166), the disclosure functions in the story present a different possibility; that Rita has the capacity to shirk prior behavioral patterns and evolve differently in this story. *Disclosure functions are thus widening the parameters of expectation set by the narrator functions, enabling the conclusion to be rhetorically rewarding even if the outcome veers from the path they initially set.*

An illustration: If an author were to describe in detail a compulsive gambler and then write that they entered a casino at three p.m. and exited at twelve midnight, the assumption of the reader is that they have most likely spent that time gambling. The disclosure functions embedded within a story work that way: they build upon the thematic introduction of the character and the setting, creating assumptions and judgments for the reader. It is the same in the case of Rita. Her character has been set by the narrator's report and now it is up to the reader to make the necessary leap, using what they have gained from the disclosure functions, to assess what she is really doing on the mountain. What makes Eggers' story interesting and compelling is that Rita does something out of character and thus something out of the ordinary occurs. This is not problematic for the conclusion as the reader's configuration should be supported by the disclosure functions. In other words, it is hardly surprising for the reader to find at the conclusion of the story that Rita has accomplished the hike, and also made a psychological turn towards accepting her role as a responsible adult, even though neither of these possibilities were plainly spelled out through the narrator's report.

In Eggers' story, the disclosure functions also work as tools, contributing to the progression of the story. To approach this idea, it is beneficial to look at the thematic repetitions used in the unveiling of an unsettling feature of Rita's climb up the mountain: her implicit responsibility (for the porters' welfare as they carry the gear and belongings of her group), and the likelihood of her failure (the success of her climb depends on a potential change in her character). Consistently placed at intervals throughout the story are statements like : "Rita cannot grip how this will work. [...] Is this not how people get sick or die?" (166) When Rita spots a porter carrying her bag she almost tells him it's her own but then realizes, "There's nothing she can say in English she'd be proud of" (173).

The repetition of these themes is important for the reader's experience of the progression: will the porters survive and will Rita make it to the top of Kilimanjaro? These questions add the necessary suspense and momentum to what would otherwise be a straightforward, linear story of a dangerous hike. It is vital, though, to note that neither of these themes are stated straight out in the story, they are left for the reader to discern through the disclosure functions. Therefore, I see the disclosure functions as more than just a path of communication between the narrator and the authorial audience. They are effectively tools for the progression of the story, prompting expectations and thus serving as convenient markers for the readerly judgments that stem from each disclosure.

At the end of the story, when Rita has become painfully cognizant of the porters' demise and is running down the mountain, the narrator starts reporting what the disclosure functions have been insinuating throughout the story:

Rita had never wanted this. Peaks mean nothing to her. [...] She never would have come this far had she known it would be like this, all wrong, so cold and with the rain coming through the tents on those men. (198)

The narrator then asks the question, though it could also feel that Rita is asking herself the same, "How could she not be responsible for this kind of thing? Maybe she is not here now, running down this mountain, and was never here. This is something she can forget. She can be not-here – she was never here" (199). As a narrator function, this report is not promising for the evolution of Rita's character. This denial of presence and responsibility quickly gives way though and ultimately, "...she cannot stop running and she cannot stop bringing the mountain down with her" (199). This conclusion is consistent with the aims of the story's telling functions: the narrator reports Rita's thoughts regarding her experience and how she is going to tackle the after-effects of such a trial through a direct question to both Rita and the reader, while the disclosure functions prompt the reader to see Rita as having evolved past her initial self, into a woman that is capable of facing the responsibility that is inherent in her choices and bringing the experience home, "bringing the mountain down with her," in order to learn something.

In the final lines of the story it is revealed that Rita has given her boots to a young porter and that her final act on the mountain is to sign her name in the log book of those who have summited successfully. She signs at the bottom of "thousands of names" (199). Thematically, this underscores the magnitude of what Rita has been a part of as well as what will most likely occur in the future. People will keep climbing and porters will keep dying.

The difference, now, is what has been accomplished through the telling functions: there is a young boy with new boots and a woman who will remember what happened and, it is safe to assume, will not be a part of such a detrimental machine again.

It is not until the conclusion that the title of the story makes sense. Rita goes up the mountain rather slowly, yet runs the entire way down. This contradicts the title if read in a literal fashion. However, if one considers that the title is implying a journey within Rita's psyche, a coming down to terms with herself while she is on her way up the mountain, then it begins to make more sense. Rita's inner journey is reported via the narrator functions, while a fuller portrait is implied through the disclosure functions. However, it is definitely the latter that enable the reader to understand the grade of evolution within Rita that takes place. In that respect, it is the disclosure functions that take this story to the next level, beyond a report of a situation and into a world of nuance.

Where does this leave the reader in relation to their own judgments in regard to the ethics of the narrative? There is a link in the continuum between the telling functions and the reader's experience of the story. In a narrative that places such importance on the strength of the telling functions, it can be said that an adequate understanding of the parameters of expectation are essential in order for a reader to experience a successful conclusion. Without those parameters in place, the reader will be unable to process both the narrator's report as well as the outcome of the report; leaving the reader with an unfinished story. This differs from Phelan's definition of a successful conclusion merely in that I call for the presence of an effect before a story can be complete. In "Up the Mountain" there is a conclusion that is not too difficult for the reader to accommodate into their final configuration of the story. Readers who will take away a rewarding experience upon finishing the story are those who are satisfied with the disclosure functions at the end of the story, or the thematic closure surrounding Rita's acceptance of her responsibility, both on the mountain and off.

Now, a look back before moving forward. First, when applying the problem statements to the character of Rita, it is interesting to identify her aesthetic role as a tool for the narrative ethics. Looking past her mimetic role as a possible woman, her thematic role as a traveler, climber and contemplator, and her synthetic role as a character inside Eggers' story; the aesthetic role that embodies Rita's purpose within the ethical rhetoric is comprised of her ethical position of (reluctantly) inquisitive climber, developing her ethical position over time to increase the reader's awareness of her evolution, while continuously using the disclosure



functions to signal an alternative reality and unveil an ethically corrupt system. It is this aesthetic role that will provoke the most vibrant judgments from the reader due to its complications when compared to the mimetic, thematic and synthetic roles Rita plays.

Secondly, in the case of this particular story, as the telling functions worked together, their independent purposes reached different conclusions that added depth to the story as well to the experience of reading. The effects of the telling functions, namely, *parameters of expectation* and *actual expectation*, helped lead the reader to (1) identify disclosure functions as prominent tools for progression within a story, and (2) widen the parameters of expectation set by the narrator functions, enabling the conclusion to be rhetorically rewarding even if the outcome veers from the path initially reported by the narrator.

When Rita is hiking up the mountain and evolving as a character, there is an undercurrent of discomfort regarding her potential success, as well as the survival of those traveling with her. This undercurrent formed by the telling functions was then able to prompt the reader to move from ethical position to ethical position as they pick up on more and more apparent clues to the true consequences of Rita's journey. This leads me to my final point: that after assessing the implicit responsibility of the telling functions in this narrative on both an aesthetic and ethical level, it can be seen that the narrator and the characters are sharing the aesthetic and ethical responsibilities that have been underscored by said functions. For it was decidedly the narrator and the characters that exercised their capacity as aesthetic and ethical entities, using the narrator's report and the connotations of the disclosure functions, in order to convey the subtle message of the story through the *parameters of expectation* and *actual expectations* of the reader. Put simply: Rita's character inhabited a space between the ethical and the aesthetic of Eggers' story. She was on the edge of speech and thought, not just Kilimanjaro.

So how did Eggers better his rhetorical results? What tools did he use? Put simply, Eggers wove an intricate, unspoken, story just below what the narrator was reporting. A helpful resource when assessing short stories in particular is Charles E. May and what he determines to be some "primary characteristics" of the genre (199). While not all of May's characteristics are applicable to Eggers' story, one does stand out, namely: "atmosphere as an ambiguous mixture of both external details and psychic projections" (199). If we look at the concepts of external details and psychic projections in relation to the two telling functions, as narrator functions and disclosure functions, it is possible to take May's characteristic even

further. The “atmosphere” then becomes not only a “mixture” but also a tool for the aesthetics and ethics inherent in the narrative. Dave Eggers skillfully used the structure of his story, as well as the content, to provoke a rhetorical response in a reader who is able to discern the appropriate “mixture.” Therefore, in relation to my argument, the characteristic that May attributes to short stories can also be seen as a vital ingredient to their rhetorical value when analyzing the potential for collaboration between the author, reader, and characters.

To quote the title of Tandon’s review in the *TLS*, Eggers used “the force of a pointed silence.” He introduced ideas (like the frailty of some of the porters), and did not fully expand on them, he pushed the character further up the mountain, and did not suggest that Rita would either fail or succeed. Eggers left the disclosure functions to do the real communicating to the readers, and not in an unwitting fashion either. His tools for a successful rhetorical relationship between the text, the reader, and himself, were the words he did not use.

**“She Waits, Seething, Blooming”: *The Ethics of the Told, or, Ethical positions and Aesthetics of Character***

For our second analysis, “She Waits” is an excellent example of ethics and aesthetics trumping the narrator and disclosure functions in service of a story’s rhetorical purpose. This could be partially due to the specific rhetorical qualities of portraiture, as well as the tripartite structure of the story which is revealed in the title. Given this aesthetic structure, the main character’s evolution follows the course of first, waiting, then developing more anger (the “seething”) and, finally, “blooming” or becoming open or mature. The reader then has a very engaging opportunity to assess the three ethical positions that the protagonist, in this case, a single mother waiting for her son, shifts between. Readerly judgments that follow the story will be inextricably linked to these ethical positions making the rhetorical purpose of the story evident at its conclusion. The satisfaction of reading the story will necessitate a level of collaboration and understanding of each emotion the protagonist reveals, while at the same time leaving room for the reader to assess the situation from their own standpoint. In other words, if the reader doesn’t follow from one level of anger or worry to the next, it will be more difficult for them to accommodate both the conclusion and their own understanding of the story.

Before beginning analysis of the story, a short reminder of the organic movement between the various ethical positions as defined by Phelan (see below), and the consequences of their inter-relatedness may be helpful. Then, through a thorough look at the story, the main character, and the progression of the story, including the effects of the temporal pacing, it is possible to evaluate what works as an aesthetic tool for the ethics of the story. When analyzing the progression and other aesthetics of the narrative it will also be natural to address some of the specific characteristics of portraiture that affect the aesthetic and ethical nature of this story. In conclusion, a summary of the ethical positions and their effects, on both the aesthetic of the narrative and the readerly judgments, will be vital to our understanding. Naturally, the concluding comments will be tested and reflected against the part of my problem statement which is in regard to the specific ethics of the told, or character-character relations. Another important detail to note, italicized statements will be repeated at the conclusion of this section and drawn into the larger context of the argument.

For ease of reference, the ethical positions that Phelan details in *Living to Tell* are as follows:

1) that of the characters within the story world; how they behave – and judge others – is inescapably tied up with ethics; 2) that of the narrator in relation to the telling, to the told, and to the audience;... 3) that of the implied author in relation to the telling, the told, and the authorial audience;... 4) that of the flesh-and-blood reader in relation to the set of values, beliefs, and locations operating in situations 1-3. (Phelan, *Living to Tell* 23)

The specific ethical position that is most relevant when assessing the ethics of the told is the first one, or that of the ethics of the characters (*Experiencing Fiction* 11). However, it is impossible to overlook the inextricable link between positions one and four, as we assess the flesh-and-blood reader's ethical position in relation to the text and their subsequent judgments. This reliance of the fourth ethical position on the first is a point that I will expand upon in this section as it is entirely congruent with the aesthetic and ethical equation in Eggers' story.

While addressing the ethical positions of the main character, there must always be necessary allowances for readerly judgments. Phelan identifies three types of judgment that can stem from evaluations of ethics: interpretive, ethical, and aesthetic (*Experiencing Fiction* 9). After identifying these categories, Phelan adds two corollaries: "a single action may evoke multiple kinds of judgment," and "because characters' actions include their judgments, readers often judge characters' judgments" (9). While this is an admirable and efficient way to

describe what is occurring on the level of readerly judgments, there are narrative elements that can contribute to the overall judgments configured by readers, with resulting effects in the overall ethics of the narrative.

In Eggers' story it seems that *possible judgments will be dependent upon which ethical positions are strengthened or weakened throughout the narrative*. The judgments that the mother incurs are related to how angry she gets, or how vengeful she is portrayed. This is dependent upon the second ethical position, or that of the narrator, as well as a close and interactive relation between the first and fourth ethical positions, between the character and the flesh-and-blood reader. As demonstrated by "She Waits," the narrator is giving us an internal perspective that unflinchingly reveals the ethical position of the character. The way this is accomplished, via the directly stated internal homodiegetic narrative, is simultaneously an ethical position and an aesthetic tool. Thus it can be said that the narrator's aesthetic form is representative of their ethical position, and an integral part of the ethics of the told. When the mother's vengeful feelings are divulged, the reader is confronted both ethically and aesthetically. In "She Waits" it is then possible to see the interdependency of the ethical positions as well as the aesthetic devices in order to guide a reader to the decided conclusion.

It is possible to tie the evolution of the character's ethical position to the evolution of the reader's judgments and vice versa. What is interesting from a scholarly perspective are the aesthetic means used to do so within this ethically loaded narrative, or any sort of narrative that provokes strong ethical judgments through the use of a constantly shifting ethical position. It is the aesthetic tool of the shifting ethics, as well as the extremely brief nature of the story, that lead the reader to a distinct judgment at the conclusion. If we are to approach this character (and their conclusion) in a rhetorically different way than we approach Rita from the first story, what is it that prompts the critical reader to do so? I would argue that the ethical positioning is so prevalent from the first sentence that a close look at the telling functions becomes a secondary priority in the meeting between the narrator and the reader. The ethics are so immediately compelling that there is little room for an analysis of reporting and disclosure functions.

At this point it is most helpful to jump into the text. A close-reading of the story will hopefully divulge some of the markers that encourage this specific analytical approach. At the very beginning, the introduction of the main character is swift yet deliberate in what it divulges. This may be an aesthetic necessity due to the brevity of the narrative at a mere two

pages. The opening line is clear and paints a fairly recognizable ethical position for most readers, “She is a single mother and has no interest in any men but her son, who is fifteen and has not called” (83). To claim that this is a character with which many can identify is not problematic, as readers may have either experienced one role or the other, as a parent or a child. There is an implication, however, that arises out of this introduction. The mother is “single” and alone by choice, as expressed through her lack of “interest” in anyone other than her son. This is not an ethically loaded position in itself though it will carry varying social connotations for a diverse group of readers with their diverse backgrounds. One of the benefits of the swift introduction and its movement into the mother’s reflections is that the reader is not given time to remember and reflect on their personal viewpoint regarding a single woman raising a son. This is a very interesting aesthetic device used to gain a reader’s collaboration and interest when touching upon subject matter that may not be guaranteed to attract empathy. Put another way, the ethical position of the mother is strengthened and the attention of the reader is grasped due to the rapid aesthetic move in the story from introduction to action. Therefore, judging from the case of Eggers’ introduction, *progression may serve as an aesthetic tool for the ethics of the story.*

A few lines later we learn that she is drinking “red wine spiked with gin” and entertaining violent notions of hitting her son with not only her hand but also a golf club (83). While this is a rather negative ethical turn for this character, the ethical position of the mother is partly redeemed when her worry and concern over the whereabouts of her son are expanded upon. She realizes that he is “testing his boundaries, perhaps, and she will remind him of the consequences of such thoughtlessness” (83). This shows her ethical position to also be one of a reflective parent and not just a drunk and angry woman. Once again, these ethical positions, along with the description of the character, are lined up and delivered in a quick manner to the reader. The fast-moving aesthetic of the story doesn’t let the reader linger in any ethical position for very long, and thus enables the fluid movement between anger and reflection to feel real and valid to the audience. From a temporal perspective, the rapid succession of emotions and ethical positions enable the reader to discern the swinging back and forth of an emotional pendulum. This type of aesthetic in a story could be troublesome when taking into account the desired collaboration between author and audience, yet here it benefits from the fact that the majority of the audience reading the story will be able to identify with at least some of the thoughts and emotions the character experiences. The ethical position of the

mother is thus unstable, yet not purely problematic. The aesthetic of the character is reflected in the same way; shifting, changing, evoking extreme emotions at both ends of the spectrum.

Continuing with the story, moments after the reader feels that a rational side of the character has been unveiled, the mother once again slides into an ethical position that embraces the pleasure of anger. “The pleasure is like that enjoyed by the passionate scratching of a body overwhelmed with irritation” (84). This is a distinctly different ethical position to take rather than the rational, reflective position of a few sentences earlier. She starts to look forward to his arrival “the way the ravenous might await a meal” (84). She begins to plan her attack, now obviously one that will be comprised of verbal assaults:

How general should her criticisms be? Should they be specific only to this night, or should this be the door through which they pass in order to talk about all of his failings? The possibilities! She will have license to go anywhere, to say anything. (84)

Yet as she plans the confrontation she is also asking questions. These questions are rhetorical in nature as they are directed at herself as well as the audience, prompting a level of awareness of both the narrator and the reader, and thus serving a rhetorical purpose. This does not affect the ethics of the text to any large degree but could be interpreted as a telling function that is relevant and essential in the maintenance of the rhetorical path from ethical position to ethical position. For the sake of clarity then: the mother’s ethical position has been wavering throughout the entire progression of the story and as we near the conclusion there come appeals to the reader’s opinion or judgment through one of the few obvious uses of the telling functions.

At this point in the story the son’s headlights are seen through the window and his arrival is imminent. The mother is eager to speak with him and describes the confrontation she anticipates as going to be “divine,” “superb,” and “florid, glorious” (84). The ethical position of one who is eager to begin (what is bound to be) a difficult discussion is questionable and provokes the reader to a level of suspicion regarding motive. Notably, this suspicion is conveyed through the disclosure functions present in the depiction of this ethical position, in order that the reader can begin to build their *actual expectations* for the final configuration of the story. The tangible anticipation of the mother is a problematic ethical question and one that is further complicated by the impending conclusion of the story but it is not rhetorically problematic, as it is in line with the *parameters of expectation* set by the reports of the narrator.

In the final lines it is said that, "...she will scratch and scratch and bloom. She runs to the door. She can't wait for it to begin" (84). With those final words, the mother is transformed from a woman who is merely contemplating a questionable ethical position to one racing towards a full-scale embrace of conflict. It takes very little imagination to envision the subsequent arrival of her son and the verbal assault she will release upon him. Looking at where this conclusion leaves each of the four ethical positions: the mother's ethical position is thus solidified with this final configuration, the narrator has maintained the same ethical position the entire time, (assuming they are continuously reporting the truth the entire time), the implied author is still in the same position, and the reader can fully embrace the ethical position they've been nurturing since the beginning of the story since there has been no great revelation or change in the character's behavior.

Here it is helpful to take a closer look at what type of conclusion this story has led the reader towards. Phelan discusses conclusions as having four different components: exposition/closure, arrival, farewell, and completion.<sup>12</sup> These are excellent guidelines yet lack certain frames for discussion of a story such as the one featured here. While Phelan doesn't state that each narrative must have each element, some critics have seen Phelan's definition of endings as problematic due to the exclusion of the more avant-garde post-modern writers and their conclusions which merely conclude with little thought to the reader's final configuration. Without getting into a discussion of that argument here, an important point to note is, with some work to expand upon the acceptable concluding elements in the definition, the potential for cross-genre application is remarkable.

In "She Waits" there is an obvious farewell and completion, yet also the distinct lack of a closure and an arrival on the part of the narrator. This could be an element of portraiture, but I would argue that it is not as simple as that. This is, from one critical vantage point, *an aesthetic device as well as ethical consequence of a story that is positioned in the ethical realm and less in the traditional realm of telling functions*. In "She Waits" there is a level of narrativity that places its emphasis on the ethical positions instead of utilizing the two telling functions to encourage parameters of expectation, thematic insights, and judgments.

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<sup>12</sup> "Exposition/Closure: when this information about the narrative, characters, or action includes a signal that the narrative is coming to an end, regardless of the state of the instabilities and tensions, it becomes a device of closure.

*Arrival*: the resolution, in whole or in part, of the global instabilities and tensions.

*Farewell*: the concluding exchanges among implied author, narrator, and audiences.

*Completion*: the conclusion of the reader's evolving responses to the whole narrative" (*Experiencing Fiction* 20-21)

Does this story then leave us with a rhetorically rewarding conclusion if we take an ethical approach to the character? The single mother takes a very clearly depicted ethical path on this particular evening, and given our limited knowledge of this character it is hard to estimate whether or not this is a routine ethical position she has chosen or whether this is a contained event that has stemmed from the actual circumstances. If the reader merely sticks to the account the events of the narrative and analyzes the ethics of the mother on that particular evening, the conclusion is troublesome, yet not unexpected. This is due to the telling functions underscoring the base of ethical positions outlined in the tripartite structure of the story. As she waits, she is reported as waiting in a certain ethical position and the disclosure functions thus deliver the *actual expectations* the reader then has for her character. As she seethes, she is reported as escalating into a more questionable ethical position, one that expands the *parameters of expectation* via the narrator functions, and then acknowledged in the disclosure functions by the reader's ongoing reconfiguration. Finally, as she blooms, she arrives at her final ethical position, one that is reported via the narrator, and made believable and possible to reconfigure by the disclosure functions that have been accessory to the ethics the entire time.

In assessing the character, and her final reconfiguration it is also vital to remember that the element of change in portraiture, according to Phelan, is "neutral...since its point is neither event nor condition but character" (*Living to Tell* 163). If character is the point in a narrative that relies on the movement between ethical positions for its progression, than perhaps in order for us to achieve a satisfactory conclusion in Eggers' story, *our resolution lies in our comprehension of the movement itself*. A reader who experiences no change in their own judgment between the ethical positions (ex: a reader who immediately, for their own personal reasons, dislikes the mother and maintains that view throughout, never attaining any level of empathy) would not feel any sort of resolution of any sort of tension. It is also possible that the arrival of the son at home would not be of any benefit to that particular reader's interpretation of the story. The readerly judgment is always going to trump the author's aesthetic and ethical guidance if it is rooted in a point of contention that precedes the reading of the narrative. In other words, if the reader is already diligently hoping for a peaceful resolution due to their own personal history involving confrontations within their own family, there is little an author can do to guide them out of their ethical position and into his own. Wayne C. Booth perhaps stated this point most succinctly, "...even the greatest of literature is radically dependent on the concurrence of beliefs of authors and readers" (*Rhetoric of Fiction* 140).



Before moving on, if we revisit the element of portraiture in the story, and its contributions to the aesthetic and ethical elements, it is possible to see that the qualities of the genre lend their self readily to a narrative dependent upon ethical positions. The narrative functions of reporting, interpreting, and evaluating are present and visible. However, the disclosure functions which were so prevalent in the previous story are truly unnecessary in this short portrait of a woman undergoing personal change in a stagnant situation. Most importantly, if the only change taking place is within the protagonist's ethical positions, then that is where the progression of the story will reside. Portraiture is then an extremely appropriate choice as an aesthetic tool for such a narrative goal.

To summarize the ethical positions and their effects on readerly judgments of characters, as illustrated via Eggers' unnamed protagonist, there have been a few points that have come to light:

1. Possible judgments will be dependent upon which ethical positions are strengthened or weakened throughout the narrative.
2. Progression may serve as an aesthetic tool for the ethics of the story.
3. The resolution of the story may lie in the comprehension of the movement itself between ethical positions.

These points are consistent with the last segment of my problem statement regarding characters, ethics, and progression as an aid to understanding both.<sup>13</sup> The mother's ethical position, as it undergoes its various transformations, creates multiple possibilities for judgments as each ethical position is either strengthened or weakened. This affects the aesthetics of the story, most visibly the progression in this particular case, and thus prompts the reader's reliance on both said progression as well as her ethical positions in order to reach a satisfactory comprehension of the narrative. In other words, the reader follows the developing anger of the mother on two levels, ethically and aesthetically, and judges accordingly. Also important to note here is that the telling functions in the case of "She Waits" are mainly utilizing the narrator's reporting of circumstances and events (narrator functions), while the disclosure functions are unnecessary for the momentum of the story.

What makes this story an interesting example of the ethics of the told is twofold. The evidence of such a one-sided presence within the ethics of the telling helped to minimize their

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<sup>13</sup> The problem statements are detailed on pgs. 5-6.

impact (if the disclosure functions had been working as hard as the narrator functions, the ethics of the told may not have surfaced so quickly in an analysis). Second, the presence of only one character in the actual story creates a situation where the ethics of the told must be interpreted via the reader's own ethical position, as opposed to receiving clues from other characters present in the story world. If the mother had been in a room with someone else and we had been given the opportunity to interpret her through their mind, there would have been the possibility for some alternative ethics to be present. Without that second character, the ethics of the told is completely reliant upon the mother and her own ethical relation to her actions.

***Where to go next? Concepts to take with us to the next chapters.***

In a discussion of ethics and aesthetics it is important to note that generalizations are not useful and that each story's aesthetics and ethics are serving a purpose that are unique to its individual goal. What has been accomplished in this chapter has been a simple beginning to a larger question: how do the telling functions work as aesthetic tools for the narrator, as well as the implied author, to use when guiding the reader into a collaboration with their characters' ethical positions? By tailoring the focus to characters and their ethics, the resulting insights have been helpful. Yet the ethics of rhetorical purpose are not complete until we identify the specific functions that provoke our ethical judgments. Thus, when we address Phelan's "aesthetic means," or "elements of craft put in service of [a narrative's rhetorical] purpose" we are attempting to see the link between the telling functions and the ethical rhetoric within the narrative (*Experiencing Fiction* 135).

By beginning with the ethics of the telling in "Up the Mountain," the telling functions are both identifiable. Yet in this first story there is an interesting difference between the narrator functions and the disclosure functions and, while making the character of Rita more compelling, it also adds the suspense to the progression. The narrator functions and the disclosure functions are co-dependent and work closely together to deliver an enticing and rhetorically rewarding narrative. However, in the case of Rita and her hike on Mt. Kilimanjaro, the disclosure functions are actually conveying information that, to a certain extent, contradicts what the narrator is reporting. This enables us to see that, in this particular story, the consequences of telling functions with independent purposes and varying conclusions can illustrate that: (1) the *parameters of expectation* are delivered via the

narrator's report but configurations made by the reader are invalid until, and (2) the *actual expectations* are formed by the disclosure functions. This is, simply put, the effects of the telling functions, and also indicative of what is happening when the reader is prompted to make a judgment about the character and about the story as a whole. By singling out and then using these terms to describe the effects of the telling functions, while at the same time seeing how Eggers used them as tools in the story's progression, it is then possible to acknowledge the implicit responsibility in the telling functions: the act of telling is bound to the reader's interpretation of the character and their interpretation of the character's ethical and aesthetic movement throughout the story. Rita became a deeper and more interesting character when the reader noticed what wasn't being reported by the narrator. Despite what had been reported about her past, Rita is a character who, via the disclosure functions, has certain responsibilities that cannot be taken away from her. These responsibilities could be defined as those pertaining to her presence as a human in this world, with the ethical choices that entails. Yet without the disclosure functions working in the story, there would be no markers to enlighten the reader as to the underlying theme in the story, much less the underlying purpose of Rita's journey.

Moving on to the ethics of the told, and the second story "She Waits," it became evident from the first sentence that an approach that first dealt with the ethical positions of the lone character would be more fruitful than merely assessing the telling functions, which could easily be accommodated at a later point in a critical study. A close study of the ethical positions revealed that they were inextricably linked with the progression of the story; so much so that they could be categorized as an aesthetic device. The consequences of this are many, however, a focus on the readerly judgments leads us to a realization that this type of aesthetic device has consequences for the resolution and conclusion of the story. The resolution then lies in the reader's comprehension of the movement itself between ethical positions. If the reader's comprehension and ensuing judgments are not in a collaborative relationship with the temporality of the story, much will be lost, namely empathy and ethics.

The "ethical dimension of the overall act" (*Experiencing Fiction* 11) has been stated as the combination of the two sets of ethics already addressed here, of the telling and the told. What has become apparent through an analysis of both stories is that the "ethical dimension" of a story in its entirety is only accessible when taking both the ethics of the telling and the ethics of the told into account, as simultaneously as possible. However, some stories prompt the reader to begin with one level of assessment before the other. This may be an aesthetic

tool used by authors, and that is one of the questions that will be approached later in this thesis. Given these first assessments of the ethics of telling and the ethics of the told, it is now a plausible experiment to apply them, as well as their effects, to other forms of narrative outside of the short story genre. First, a novel composed as a form of serial narration with elements of portraiture, lyric, and standard telling, and later, a social novel that strongly relies upon the ethics of its characters for its aesthetic and ethical effects.

## CHAPTER THREE: THE ETHICS OF TELLING

### *Let the Great World Spin* by Colum McCann

Among the various approaches to structure and format utilized by contemporary authors, none have proven to lend themselves more aptly to the study of multiple character narration than those written as “serial narration.”<sup>14</sup> *Let the Great World Spin* is a novel which demonstrates the possibilities inherent in this aesthetic format, and that so easily embraces a number of ethical positions; those of multiple characters. As already emphasized by the previous chapter, there is a continuous partnership between the aesthetic and the ethical in the rhetorical theory of narrative. By analyzing some key chapters from McCann’s novel, I would like to suggest that this partnership is stronger than ever when the multiple characters in serial narration are strung along through a novel, somewhat like stepping stones on a rhetorical path. The pertinent question that arises after an analysis of the varying character narratives and their implications is: what types of character narration are utilized, and how do these multiple ethical positions, in such an aesthetically wandering narrative, come to a successful conclusion?

*Let the Great World Spin*, or *LGWS*, is a novel written in four books, each consisting of a number of chapters, yet with varying narrators. The plot, centered around lives and events in New York City and its close neighbor, the Bronx, is relatively simple and delivers the first clue that the novel’s progression is less impacted by events than by the characters’ developments. The first section, which precludes Book One, introduces the funambulist, or tightrope walker, whose amazing journey between the twin towers of the World Trade Center provides a common thread, and the only repetition of a narrator, between most of the following chapters. The funambulist is the only character in the novel to remain unnamed and it is not accidental that he is also the only character that is based on an actual real-life person, Philippe Petit. Petit’s walk in 1974 was an event that was widely covered in the media, and, more recently, was the subject of the 2008 Academy Award winning documentary, *Man on Wire*. This event, the crossing between the twin towers, is pivotal for a number of the characters, and is one of the few events that actually takes place within the real story time in

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<sup>14</sup> Here, this term refers to a larger narrative project with, in the case of McCann’s novel, a range of narrators. Another good working definition can be found in the glossary of Phelan’s *Living to Tell*: “The use of multiple narrators, each taking turns, to tell the tale” (218).

the novel. The rest of the plot revolves around two Irish brothers living in the desperately poor housing projects of the Bronx in the 1970's amongst a multitude of characters. Corrigan is a monk who has taken to ministering to prostitutes under a nearby expressway, and Ciaran is his brother who has come to visit while working at an Irish pub. Added to the character constellation of the story are, among others: Tillie and her daughter Jazzlyn, both heroin addicted prostitutes; Claire, a wealthy upper-east side resident who has lost her only son in Vietnam; Lara, an unhappy artist in an unhealthy relationship; Adelita, Corrigan's love-interest and mother of two; Gloria, a proud African American woman who has lost all three of her sons in Vietnam; and, our summarizing and final character narrator, Jaslyn, survivor and daughter of Jazzlyn.

A plot summary reveals a limited number of actual events in the story: Corrigan dies in a car accident with Jazzlyn while on the way home from the courthouse in lower Manhattan, most likely due to (1) his shock at seeing a man traversing the World Trade center towers on a tightrope; and (2) being clipped from behind by a vintage car driven by an artistic couple coming off a cocaine binge, Lara and Blaine. Claire and Gloria are both members of a support group for women who have lost sons in the Vietnam War, and their relationship develops past their initial insecurities. All of the other characters seem to spin out from these initial people and their instabilities, while simultaneously influenced by the occurrence of the tightrope walk. It is relatively safe to say that there is limited action in this novel, and while it takes place in different scenes, at different times, the temporal scope of the novel is limited to a few days, while being littered with recollections. The final chapter, which resolves all of the global instabilities, or larger questions in the narrative, takes place many years later, after 9/11. This temporal leap is an interesting feature, and potentially necessary given the aesthetics of the serial narrative. It aids the final character, Jaslyn, in her reconfiguration of events and characters, as the distance between herself and the events she refers back to help to underscore the narrator functions and disclosure functions in her telling. Thus, the temporal leap reads naturally, while delivering a rhetorically pleasing configuration, and most importantly perhaps, the resolution of instabilities that an author inherently promises a reader when constructing a narrative.

While each character offers a unique perspective and ethical position for the reader to experience, it is also pertinent to define the role each chapter plays in the greater part of the aesthetic structure and its addition to the greater rhetorical structure of the serial narration. By returning to James Phelan's "telling functions" (*Living to Tell* 12) we can pull apart the

tapestry of the narrative to see what the individual threads offer in terms of ethics. According to Phelan, the ethics of the telling are comprised of two ethical positions that can be seen as corresponding to two distinct telling functions: narrator functions and disclosure functions, defined once again here for ease of reference, as the following:

Disclosure functions refer to the communication along the track from the narrator to the authorial audience, while narrator functions refer to the communication along the track from the narrator to the narratee. (*Living to Tell* 214-15)

As the various characters unveil their stories and purposes, it will be of interest to both the ethical and aesthetic rhetoric of the story to see what roles each character plays as well as how they utilize the telling functions. Beginning with “A Fear of Love” which is narrated by Lara, it is possible to work from the inside of the story out, using these telling functions as markers per se, to see what the specific ethical qualities of portraiture add to the serial narration. Does portraiture come in lieu of progression in serial narration, and what will the role of such a chapter be in the larger progression towards a successful completion?

Next, our focus will be on “This is the House that Horse Built,” a lyric narrative, narrated by Tillie the prostitute, which offers a distinct opportunity to see an efficient way to provoke an empathetic response from a reader, particularly if compared to the larger aesthetic techniques used by Franzen in *Freedom*. When referring to Tillie’s narrative as “lyric,” I am using the term in the same way that James Phelan defines it in *Experiencing Fiction*:

(1) Somebody telling somebody else (or even himself or herself) on some occasion for some purpose that something is – a situation, an emotion, a perception, an attitude, a belief; (2) somebody telling somebody else (or even himself or herself) on some occasion about his or her meditations on something; to put it another way, in this mode, the poem records the speaker’s thoughts. Furthermore, in both kinds of lyric, the authorial audience is less in the position of observer and judge and more in the position of participant (22).

Tillie’s reflections are powerful enough to carry the weight of such a definition, as they are mediations and sentiments that are directly addressed to the reader, while adding another dimension to the progression of the larger narrative structure. Though there is a measure of contention regarding the place of lyric and lyrical narratives in larger narrative forms, such as a novel in this case, by beginning with Phelan’s work on the subject, it is possible to work towards a more complete picture of what the genre has to offer narrative theory. Lyricity, in service of a larger narrative purpose, is interesting for number of reasons, not least in its specific approach to the disclosure functions versus the narrator functions. The addition such a chapter makes to the larger progression of the narrative is not to be underestimated, and

should be noted for its specific ethical and rhetorical qualities in regard to the larger aesthetic project. Put another way, it is vital for a reader to acknowledge the element of direct appeal that a lyric narrative utilizes. To ignore the ethics and aesthetics of such a tool is to ignore what the text is offering.

“Let the Great World Spin Forever Down” and “The Ringing Grooves of Change” are both chapters that share the funambulist as the main character, and a third person, omniscient narrator. These chapters, while offering a different type of portraiture, also display the ethical effects of a nonfictional reference. By this, I mean the ethical positions and judgments that result from a main character that walks the line, so to speak, between fiction and nonfiction. By analyzing the rhetorical weight of these chapters and their functions in the larger serial narrative, it is possible to see what their addition to the reader’s configurations will entail, during and at the conclusion of the novel.

The final chapter for evaluation, “Roaring Seaward, and I Go,” resolves any claims that may arise out of the larger narrative. The expectations and configurations of readers will either be rewarded or disappointed at this stage of the narrative. It is here that a display of how a serial narrative, with, ultimately, very little plot, can be brought to a successful and rewarding rhetorical conclusion, despite varying portraitures, lyric narrative, and character narrators. However, is it enough to merely resolve global instabilities in such a case? And how does this final character narrator make a contribution to the greater narrative project? Is the disclosure function too great, or is there still room for narrator functions in a final chapter of a serial narrative?

Concluding this chapter, we will revisit what we’ve brought with us from chapters one and two to see if what has been divulged from the various genres of narrative within McCann’s novel can add to our understanding of the aesthetic roles of characters, the ethics of telling, and the ethics of the told. What looks rather clear from the start is that the rhetorical dance across the different points of character narration in a serial narrative can be seen as skipping from stepping stone to stepping stone. The primary objective of this chapter is to analyze what the purpose or service each stepping stone performs, and what the reader continues to carry with them in the form of ethical and aesthetic judgments until they reach the ending. Then it is possible to make a judgment regarding the narrativity of the novel, as well as potentially discern relevant principles regarding the particular rhetoric inherent in serial narration. The progression of *LGWS* leads up to a successful conclusion, and there are



some simple answers regarding the global instabilities of the story that tell us why. Yet, close analysis and discussion of the telling functions, as well as the ethics and aesthetics of the story, will offer a clearer view of the rhetorical dynamics in action. Even more enlightening, and perhaps even more relevant in regard to my problem statement, would be possible insights resulting from a look at the ethical aspects of the functions.

### ***“A Fear of Love”: Portraiture***

The specific services portraiture adds to a serial narrative are varying and dependent on what types of characters are being developed and what their greater role in the novel is. Thus, whether a portraiture comes in lieu of, or contributes to, progression in serial narration, and the role of such a chapter in the larger progression towards a successful completion, are interesting topics for inquiry when analyzing a novel that formats much of its text in such a fashion. Lara’s chapter, titled “A Fear of Love” after her final lines, demonstrates both disclosure functions and narrator functions well (i.e., “reporting, interpreting, and evaluating” (Phelan *Living to Tell* 12)), and serves as a beneficial introduction to the ethics of the telling within McCann’s novel.

Portraiture, and its specific characteristics in regard to the rhetorical theory of narrative, can be defined by a few key points, all of which have been elaborated upon by James Phelan in both *Living to Tell About It* and *Experiencing Fiction*. For the sake of continuity and ease, I will mention here the points that are most pertinent for our identification of Lara’s chapter as portraiture. Those include, but are not limited to: important mimetic and thematic elements of Lara as a character, events that reveal these mimetic and thematic elements, such as iterative accounts and mini-narratives that “progress according to the logic of the dramatic situation” (Phelan *Living to Tell* 163), and on the readerly side, an ethical judgment but one whose “role involves comprehending and contemplating the character rather than judging him or her” (*Living to Tell* 217).

While on the surface Lara’s telling seems to be a textbook narrative account, as she is essentially telling her version of what happened, there are some divergent factors that lead us away from a basic level of narrativity. While her account is littered with recollections of events, there is very little change other than two or three events that add to the revelation of her as a character. While some would argue that two or three events would constitute enough

change in the situation of the character to remove the narrative from the league of portraiture, I would argue that the greater service of Lara's narrative is in the revelation of her character. In other words, when in doubt, looking at the service of the narrative, or what the power of the particular chapter is being used for, is ultimately most relevant when defining the category we choose for the narrative. This is especially true for "A Fear of Love" as the other defining elements of the narrative are pursuant to portraiture.

Lara begins her chapter with a recollection of her experience in the car the day that she and her husband Blaine hit the van driven by Corrigan, resulting in his and Jazzlyn's death. "Being inside the car, when it clipped the back of the van, was like being in a body we didn't know. The picture we refuse to see of ourselves. That is not me, that must be somebody else" (115). This opening can be read both figuratively and literally, leading the reader to both see Lara in the car at the time of the accident, but also to see Lara as an observer of her own life. Such guidance is relevant for the narrator and the reader, as it highlights the importance of the different telling functions at play in Lara's narrative, as well as the initial ethical position Lara inhabits. On the narrator level, Lara reports and evaluates this event. On the level of disclosure, we learn that this is an event that has passed some time ago, that Lara has had the ability to reflect upon the event, and the implication that her character (including her ethical position) is now changed due to the clarity of such a reflection.

Here it is possible to assess the effects of the functions, as detailed in the previous chapter, as giving the reader the *parameters of expectation* necessary to accommodate the story, and the *actual expectations* that form the reader's experience of the narrative. The parameters of expectation report that Lara inhabits this particular life, yet the actual expectations are conveying that change is on the way, if it hasn't already come. Lara is relating "the picture we refuse to see of ourselves" in a detailed and unrelenting fashion (115). If she wasn't going to evolve into something new, it wouldn't be necessary to confront something she had refused to see in the past. Adding to this signal of change is the fact that both of the effects of the functions coincide carefully with Lara's ethical position, showing that the ethical aspects of the functions in Lara's portraiture are woven tightly into the story. The benefit of such a collision between functions and ethical positions may be a mere strengthening of the plot and theme. However, as McCann's chapter shows, it may also strengthen the reader's involvement in that it becomes impossible to separate the reader's expectations from the ethics of the character. Put another way, Lara, through her telling, helps the reader to expect that she will undergo some sort of evolution and the disclosure of her

ethical position is underscoring that expectation; hence, the connection between the functions and the ethics.

Lara goes on to recollect the accident, remembering the devastating scene with an accurate eye, signaling the reliability of a witness to whom truth is important. She explains how the decision to keep driving home was made, after having seen that there was nothing they could do to help, and that they would most likely make a mess of their lives if interrogated by the police. She details the care they had taken with their artwork in the backseat of the car, but reflects, “If only we had been so careful with ourselves” (116). This is one of many signals of the ethical transformation that Lara has achieved since the accident, and as well as serving as a thematic and mimetic marker, it also adequately sets the temporal frame of the portraiture, as the recollections of a woman who has had the luxury of a number of years to process the damages done to herself and others. In the story as in life, it seems that the more thoughtful contemplation conveyed from the protagonist to the reader, the more the disclosure functions reveal as a potential for personal evolution. The picture that Lara once refused to see of herself is thus elaborated through the rest of the chapter as she unflinchingly revisits the key moments of her last years as an artist and as Blaine’s wife. This adds depth not only to the parameters of expectation for her story, but also builds upon the actual expectations of the authorial audience, morphing over time into expectations of redemption.

When recounting the drive home to their cabin, and her disagreement with Blaine regarding their handling of the accident, Lara is also revisiting the damage done to her own life by drug use. After a year or so of clean living, Lara and Blaine had relapsed the day before the accident. Upon returning home she muses, “This is not my life. These are not my cobwebs. This is not the darkness I was designed for” (121). The narrator function in this portraiture reports their return journey and the subsequent emotional state of their home, while the disclosure function enables the reader to see the reluctance of the narrator to live that particular life, and signals change in the personal evolution of the character to come.

Lara then goes deeper into her recollections of the life she and Blaine had led in NYC, the parties, drugs, etc. “The parties rolled on like rain” (124). When they hit bottom and decide to move far enough away from Manhattan that its temptations cannot reach them she says, “We were the edge, the definers. We developed our idea to live in the twenties, a Scott and Zelda going clean” (126). As most literary readers will be aware, Scott and Zelda did not have an easy existence, neither while sober nor otherwise. Their tumultuous lifestyle bore

irreparable damage to both themselves and those around them. If McCann was looking for an adequate parallel for Lara and Blaine for purposes of character revelation, he did well by using the Fitzgeralds.<sup>15</sup>

When Lara is finished recounting how they had arrived at their current living situation by the lake in upstate New York, she returns to the day following the accident. Blaine had parked their car inside the garage where no one would notice its damage, and the paintings they had taken such great care with the day before had been left outside in the rain. Lara spends the day avoiding her husband and as she lies down to go to sleep “[...]Blaine stared out over the water, licking the very last of the coke from the inside of the plastic baggie” (127). The disclosure functions of this segment revealing the distance, both physical and mental, between Lara and her husband at that point in their history, and adding to the actual expectations of change in the case of Lara in particular.

The following day Lara walks to a diner down the road from their cabin and has a difficult time functioning in public with the accident still so fresh in her mind. She reflects on the day’s news of Nixon’s resignation, and recollects an ex-boyfriend who was wounded in Vietnam. These musings only lead her back to the situation at hand:

The mind makes its shotgun leaps: punch them away, yes, in a drawer.

I saw the girl from the crash again, her face appearing over his shoulder. It was not the whites of her feet this time. She was full and pretty. No eye shadow, no makeup, no pretense. She was smiling at me and asking why I had driven away, did I not want to talk to her, why didn’t I stop, come, come, please, did I not want to see the piece of metal that had ripped open her spine, and how about the pavement she had caressed at fifty miles per hour? (130)

While this passage performs an obvious narrator function, giving an adequate description to the reader of what happened to Jazzlyn in the accident, it also performs a disclosure function; one of revelation of regret. Lara is adequately evaluating the situation she witnessed as an uneven exchange between herself and the woman who died in the accident. As Lara beneficially performs both telling functions, it is possible to see that the greater service of her telling is, once again, to reveal her own character, as the disclosure of the details of the accident really only serve to underscore Lara’s own grief and regret, not to resolve a larger instability. The level of grief and regret should at this point be in accordance with the reader’s actual expectations of Lara as a character. They are necessary emotional elements as they

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<sup>15</sup> For a riveting account of Zelda Fitzgerald’s life together with F. Scott Fitzgerald, and a rather exact tally of the damage they inflicted upon each other, see Nancy Milford’s *Zelda: A Biography*, 1970.

convey both an ethical position for Lara, but also an ethical position for the reader. The effects of ethical aspects of functions once again strengthen the reader's involvement in that it becomes impossible to separate the reader's expectations from the ethics of the character.

Lara's breakfast at the diner continues as she scans the paper to see the story about the man who walked on a tightrope between the World Trade Center towers. "He said that if he saw oranges he wanted to juggle them, if he saw skyscrapers he wanted walk between them. I wondered what he might do if he walked into the diner and found the scattered pieces of me, lying around, too many of them to juggle" (131). Once again, Lara's disclosure functions, her revelation of a temporal placement and the thematic tie between herself and the rest of the book's inhabitants, are hand in hand with a greater narrator function. Lara reports, interprets, and then evaluates the funambulist's walk as having something to do with her own troubling situation. She, in a rather emotive way, applies him to her ethical predicament. This makes her thoughts, once again, more functional as a device to help the reader comprehend her as a character, than to remind the reader of the sequence of events.

The next scene that Lara recalls is of her visit to the Metropolitan Hospital in Manhattan. She recalls going in and finding herself, first, representing herself falsely as a family member, then, collecting the possessions of Corrigan and Jazzlyn.

I had taken it out of embarrassment, out of a sense of duty to my lie, an obligation to save face, and perhaps even to save my hide. [...] I had set all these things in motion and all they got for me was a handful of a dead man's things. I was clearly out of my depth (136).

Once again Lara uses the recollection of an event, a visit to the hospital, to reveal her own reactions, interpretations, and evaluations of herself. When she learns that both Corrigan and Jazzlyn have passed away, she is sad, and acknowledges her own inadequacy in comprehending the situation. Yet as a character narrator, she is still painting a reliable portrait for the reader of her own self. Her disclosure functions and narrator functions are still working together towards the greater goal of helping the reader observe and comprehend her through setting parameters of expectation and actual expectations.

Lara then recounts her visit to the Bronx, where she returns the box of belongings to Ciaran and Adelita, who are preparing for Jazzlyn's funeral. "What I was doing was unpardonable and I knew it. I could feel my chest thumping in my blouse, but the women parted for me, and I went through their curtain of grief" (141). As she recounts her meeting with Ciaran, and her subsequent attendance at the funeral, Lara reveals more about herself.

She recounts the priest's words at Jazzlyn's grave, as he explained "This was a vile world. It forced her to do vile things. She had not asked for it. It had become vile for her, he said. She was under the yoke of tyranny" (145). Both the narrator and disclosure functions are working together here to report and evaluate the situation, but also to show the readers a different view of the scene, through the priest's interpretation of a prostitute's "vile" life. What adds to the portraiture of Lara here is her reaction following the priest's successful (he managed to make the pimp responsible for Jazzlyn to leave the premises) and thought-provoking sermon.

Ciaran steadied my arm. I was feeling cold and dirty: it was like putting on a fourth-hand blouse. I had no right to be there. I was treading on their territory. But something in the service was pure and true: *Behind you will be a life that you never want to see again* (147).

Here is the distinct link between Jazzlyn and Lara, filling in a blank in the portraiture of both characters, but especially Lara's. Neither of them is proud of their past, as both could be described as having acted in a "vile" manner in different ways, on different occasions. Yet in the midst of this revelation of Lara's character, her mirroring of Jazzlyn's morality, Lara also acknowledges the ethical flaw in her attendance at the event. The event thus serves as another useful tool in the depiction of Lara and her ethics as a character.

After the funeral Ciaran sees the vintage car that Lara is driving and pieces together her reasons for being there. His anger subsides quickly and they agree to go to a bar for a drink. The conclusion of the chapter is a sort of coming-to-terms for both Lara and Ciaran, as they ask necessary questions of each other, in order to come to a satisfactory ethical configuration regarding their meeting, and the way their respective paths have crossed. Lara describes Ciaran recalling Corrigan "[...] he made people become what they didn't think they could become. He twisted something in their hearts. Gave them new places to go. Even dead, he'd still do that" (154). This is a key insight which is valuable in the larger progression of the story. Thematically, it signals that the main progression of these characters and their stories, in this particular serial narrative, is an internal one, comprised of people's hearts and self-confidences. A portraiture's progression is dependent upon the revelation of character and so is McCann's novel. It is the evolution of characters, one by one, that make the story go deeper for every chapter.

In "A Fear of Love," as the "logic of the dramatic situation" progresses (Phelan *Living to Tell* 163), the mini-narratives build one upon the next until a clear portrait of Lara's unhappy life is painted for the reader. The conclusion of the chapter does solve one

instability: how can Lara live with knowing that she and her husband were responsible for the deaths of two people, and that they didn't stop to take responsibility for their actions? While the resolution of this instability, in her meeting with Ciaran and attending Jazzlyn's funeral, may give reason to denounce Lara's narrative as portraiture, the resolution is ultimately in the service of defining Lara as a character, giving her an obvious ethical position, and revealing her as a valid mimetic and thematic element in the story world. That is why the claim that portraiture can bring additional levels of progression to a serial narrative, while utilizing evolutions of characters, ethical and otherwise, is reasonable. Specifically regarding the ethics of the telling, the effects of functions are the same when applied to McCann's portraiture as when they were applied to the previous examples, and they added to the progression rather than distract from it. The newer angle that this chapter brought to attention was how closely tied the effects of the functions and the ethical aspects of the functions can be.

### ***“This is the House that Horse Built”: Lyric Narrative***

“This is the House that Horse Built,” a chapter written as a lyric narrative, narrated by Tillie the prostitute, provokes an empathetic response from the reader when the perspective of the character is shared by the reader. This lyricality contributes to the service of a larger narrative purpose, and is interesting for a number of reasons, not least in its specific approach to the disclosure functions versus the narrator functions. The addition such a chapter makes to the larger progression of the narrative is not to be underestimated, and should be noted for its specific ethical and rhetorical qualities in regard to the larger aesthetic project.

According to Phelan, typical characteristics present in narratives with a high degree of lyricality are: characters as speakers, events subordinated to thoughts/beliefs/emotions, change is “neutral [...] it may or may not be present – and invested not in character and event but in thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, emotions, specific conditions” (*Living to Tell* 162), progression is governed by the author's sense of the best “logic of revelation” (*Living to Tell* 173), and the use of “emotive force” can be stronger than the usual force of logic when the character invites us to share their perspective.<sup>16</sup> Tillie's lyric narrative displays all of these characteristics while drawing the reader into a compelling, yet desperately sad situation.

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<sup>16</sup> “Emotive force” is mentioned by Phelan in his discussion of “Now I Lay Me” by Ernest Hemingway (*Living to Tell About It* 171-72).

The title, and later one of the final lines, of Tillie's chapter is the first clue that something is amiss, as she mentions "Horse." The term is much better understood in the social context of the 1970's, as it was a street name for heroin. This signals the addiction that Tillie, and later, her own child will struggle with. The interesting context in which she employs the term is reminiscent to the poem "This is the house that Jack built"; a poem that is widely cited as a derogatory phrase describing a poorly-constructed building. The rest of the chapter describes how Tillie's "house" was built, and as the reader learns more about her thoughts and beliefs regarding her situation, the house becomes the prison cell which she is literally sitting in as she recounts her life.

Tillie's unapologetic recollections are broken into text segments that skip across time and subject, but all of them are laced with the emotive force necessary to demonstrate the power of mere recollections on a sad life. Some of the segments are only a few sentences, yet make their point clearly and concisely: "I left the spoon in the baby formula. Thirty-eight years old. There ain't no prizes" (199). The spoon here would refer to the spoon she used to cook her drugs before injecting them, as she apparently continued to do after having given birth to Jazzlyn. The segment immediately following this describes how she came to be a prostitute :

Hooking was born in me. That's no exaggeration. I never wanted no square job. [...] When I was thirteen I already had my hands on the hip of a man in a raspberry suit. He had a waist like a lady's, but he hit me hard. His name was Fine. He loved me so much, he didn't put me on the stroll, he said he was grooming me" (199).

While this segment gives the reader a glimpse into her origins as a prostitute, it serves both narrator functions as well as some rather interesting disclosure functions. The narrator functions served here are the rather obvious reporting and interpreting, as Tillie tells us what happened. Yet Tillie's interpretation of her past demonstrates that she is flawed when it comes to an ethically adequate description of her former pimp. This flaw is a signal that comes to the reader through the disclosure function and not the narrator function. Thinking back to the link between the effects of the functions and their ethical aspects (as previously discussed in relation to Lara's narration) is helpful here. Put more simply, the reporting flaws that pop up in a lyric narrative add to the disclosure functions, and potentially make them more relevant than if they were merely dismissed as poor narrator functions, or worse, a simple sign of unreliability. Thus this is another point at which the close-knit relationship between the effect of the disclosure functions (the reader's actual expectations) and the ethical aspect of that function can be seen. Tillie is expected to be flawed; she is a jailed prostitute. The ethical



aspect of the expectations requires the reader to make the jump from writing her off as an unreliable narrator, to a flawed individual reporting to the best of her ability, flaws included. Perhaps the phrase “benefit of the doubt” is the most apt to describe what the disclosure functions require of the reader.

Moving through the chapter, Tillie’s bleak past is unveiled, incident by incident, and her love for her daughter is expounded on, “[...] *I’m gonna treat her good all her life*” (200). Yet Tillie’s plans for her daughter and herself are continuously contingent on a successful career as a prostitute:

I said to myself, I said, I’m gonna make enough money to go home to Jazzlyn and buy her a big house with a fireplace and a deck out the back with lots of nice furniture. That’s what I wanted.

I’m such a fuck-up. No one’s a bigger fuck-up than me. No one’s gonna know that, though. That’s my secret. I walk through the world like I own it. Watch this spot. Watch it curve (200).

Most readers are now aware of the disconnect between the story world’s reality and Tillie’s past dreams and ambitions for her family. This failure in both motherhood and life is Tillie’s greatest sorrow, though she confesses its secret nature to the reader. Approached as a narrator function, this report, or confession, is true and valid. However, it is part of the sorrow of the novel that readers and most likely observers within the story world are well aware of Tillie’s failings, through the disclosure functions within her lyric narrative. When Tillie explains that she can “walk through the world like [she] owns it,” it is glaringly obvious that she is the only one who believes this, as most readers are aware that a prostitute is a very visible presence on a street, hence the lack of secrecy, and under the control of a male pimp, hence the lack of ownership of one’s own self. This combination of both narrator function (Tillie reports her failed ambitions for her family), and disclosure function (Tillie’s apparent inability to grasp basic truths, such as her own servitude to drugs and pimps, and the fact that her failures are most likely public knowledge), is effective in its display of the conflict within Tillie’s character. The clarity of her depiction and the devastating consequences of her decisions are a difficult, yet powerful combination, one that underscores not only the narrator functions and disclosure functions, but the emotive force as well, as the reader sees Tillie’s failings depicted just as clearly as her desires for a normal life.

Tillie then mentions her cell mate, signaling her confinement to a prison, which was implied earlier in the novel, when the prostitutes were rounded up one day in a raid by the

local law enforcement in the Bronx. This particular disclosure allows the reader to understand that Tillie is incarcerated and thus constructing this lyric narrative in a controlled environment where there is very little change and few events. A jailhouse monologue suits the lyric form well and Tillie takes advantage of her time to continue on in her musing, though the reader and the parameters of expectation are now in agreement that the narrative is going to end at some point, and that the chances for a happy ending have minimized significantly. In other words, if Tillie was speaking from a happier place, perhaps a home in the suburbs, or even a rehabilitation facility, it would affect the parameters of expectation as well as the ethical position of both herself and the reader. But with the situation as it stands, a successful completion of Tillie's story is hinted at having a darker tone.

Tillie's situation becomes more bleak as she goes into more detail, yet she takes time throughout the narrative to recount how funny she was, "There I was, cracking myself up again" (208). This humor is helpful in portraying Tillie's attitude towards life for the reader but it also becomes a respite from the iterative statements that become more present as the chapter progresses. She repeatedly uses the term "fuck-up" to describe herself on almost every other page. When Tillie describes helping Jazzlyn shoot heroin in order to "keep her safe" she begins repeating the title of the chapter again, "This is the house that Horse built. This is the house that Horse built" (219). Following a quick description of her feelings regarding becoming a grandmother, the next lines she repeats for emphasis are:

I spent the last seven years fucking in the inside of refrigerator cars. I spent the last seven years fucking in the inside of refrigerator cars. Yeah. I spent the last seven years fucking in the inside of refrigerator cars.

Tillie Fuck-Up Henderson. (219-20)

This repetition is in line with what James Phelan terms "redundant telling, necessary disclosure" (*Living to Tell* 12) and underscores the functions of Tillie's words. Here, the redundant telling does not refer to the redundancy of stating the same sentence three times. Instead, it refers to the repetition of information that the reader already possesses. Thus, Tillie's telling functions are put to use in order to convey her disbelief and dismay regarding those events, as well as to emphasize the emotive force behind those words. As a narrator function, the reporting is useful as the reader sees how much of her life has been consumed by prostitution. As a disclosure function, the statement's repetition emphasizes the emotion with which Tillie recollects her past. As J. Hillis Miller stated so perfectly in *Fiction and*

*Repetition*, “In a novel, what is said two or more times may not be true, but the reader is fairly safe in assuming that it is significant” (2).

The next recurring motif in her narrative is the “jolly pipe” (228), which she uses in reference to the place she has decided to hang herself from. This is perhaps the clue that gives away the completion of the chapter, but it cannot be said to be surprising given the nature of Tillie’s thoughts, beliefs, and emotions. Tillie states, “I ain’t gonna whine either before or after I do it” (230), describing her approach to suicide, and it echoes her previous approach to life and prostitution. In this stark and rather depressing lyric narrative, Tillie is never guilty of whining. When she matter-of-factly confesses her suicidal plans to her cell mate it is in a manner that merely provokes the question of “When?” from the unnamed woman (232). Tillie’s report of that particular exchange can once again illustrate how the narrator functions and the disclosure functions work so closely together in the lyric narrative. Tillie reports the exchange, admitting that she doesn’t even know the name of the woman she is living together with, while also admitting that she plans to kill herself. The disclosure function becomes apparent when we see that Tillie is suicidal enough to repeatedly refer to the pipe she will hang herself from, as well as the lack of interest she shows for her surroundings, as they are only temporary.

The one positive force that keeps Tillie’s desire to die in check is the promise of seeing her “babies”, Jazzlyn’s children, which becomes a reality when Gloria brings them to visit (233-34). In her description of that meeting, in the children’s reaction to her in jail, as well as the fact that they obviously didn’t remember who she was, the reader can see that Tillie achieves some closure. She judges correctly that Gloria is well-suited to take care of her grandchildren and that the lives they will lead under her guidance are going to be more prosperous than what Tillie has been capable of as a mother and grandmother. After they leave Tillie reflects, “I cried all night. I ain’t ashamed. I don’t want them working no stroll. Why did I do what I done to Jazzlyn? That’s the thing I’d like to know, Why did I do what I done?” (234).

Her question is finally answered at the conclusion of the chapter. She admits to being a “junkie” and lays her plans for her future, after death.

I was a junkie then. I guess I always have been. That ain’t no excuse.

I don’t know if the world’ll ever forgive me for the bad I slung her way. I ain’t gonna sling it the way of the babies, not me.

-  
This is the house that Horse built.

-  
I'd say good-bye, except I don't know who to say it to. I ain't whining. That's just the fuck-off truth. God is due his ass-kicking.

Here I come, Jazzlyn, it's me.

I got a knuckle-duster in my sock. (236)

Tillie's lyric narrative ends with her beliefs and ambitions being summarized within those final text fragments. Tillie's revelations are thus brought to a successful conclusion, as the reader knew to expect this suicide via their actual expectations, and that Tillie's closure in regard to her grandchildren not only allowed it, it demanded it. If Tillie stays present in the lives of the grandchildren, she is concerned, and rightly so, of "the bad" she may "sling" into their lives. The perspective and ethical position the reader has developed through the narrative is also reinforced as Tillie is sure to point out that being a drug-addict is "no excuse" for her behavior and her decisions; a perspective most likely shared by the authorial audience in 2010. The change that has taken place is Tillie's decision to commit suicide, though it could be argued that that particular thought had already occurred to her well before her monologue began, and that the revelation of this thought was the main focus of the progression. It is thus fully possible to see what Phelan states in *Living to Tell*, "The power of the ending [in a lyric narrative], then, arises through the synthesis of our clearer vision of the protagonist's situation and our capacity to feel with him" (191). The reinforcement of Tillie's revelations by the intricate use of the narrator functions and the disclosure functions to provoke the emotive force of the piece is successful, and also contributes to this rewarding final configuration in a troubling and masterful lyric monologue.

Tillie's chapter is unique within McCann's novel for its stark lyricism. The contribution this makes to the larger serial narrative is undoubtedly one of great importance, though plot-wise not very significant. The lyric revelation of Tillie's attitude regarding her present and past serves as a vehicle for character development as well as a tool in the larger progression of the novel. What kind of tool it is can be measured most appropriately by assessing the rhetorical weight of this chapter in relation to the others. Tillie's story stays with the reader, and is addressed later by Jaslyn, her granddaughter, as a narrative that builds upon

the thematic and mimetic of the novel, reinforcing ethical positions and judgments through the telling functions, as opposed to plot progression. This is to be expected in a lyric narrative, with its neutral stance on issues of change and events, yet it remains a curious, however effective addition to a serial narrative.

***“Those Who Saw Him Hushed,” “Let the Great World Spin Forever Down” and “The Ringing Grooves of Change”: Narrativity, Hybrids, and Referentiality***

Immediately following Tillie’s compelling lyric narrative is a picture taken of Philippe Petit’s walk across the wire between the World Trade Center towers. For the reader it is a subtle reminder to look upwards, towards the heavens where not only there are funambulists to be found, but now, also Tillie Henderson. The chapter following the picture, “The Ringing Grooves of Change,” is dedicated to the unnamed funambulist, though McCann has made no attempts to disassociate his tightrope walker from Petit. This chapter is the third and final present in the novel, in which the funambulist is addressed from a narrative perspective; the first being the chapter before Book One titled “Those Who Saw Him Hushed,” and the second which is present at the end of Book One titled “Let the Great World Spin Forever Down.”

It is interesting to address these chapters for the very simple reason that they stand out from amongst the others: all three center on one character and his actions. The first is a mere observation of the people on the street and around the World Trade Center when the funambulist steps onto the edge of the building, before beginning his walk. The next two chapters go much more into detail and provide an internal heterodiegetic narration of the man’s story, and though they are neither portraiture nor lyric narratives, they do have some of the elements of both. There are mini-narratives, iterative accounts, and all of the events serve to reveal the character of the funambulist. However, the portraiture-like characteristics of these two chapters are overruled by the progression of events in the tightrope walker’s story, the change that the character undergoes due to his achievement, and the fact that the narrator encourages the reader to pass judgment on the actions of the protagonist. These three elements are thus efficient in cancelling out the potential for portraiture that comes to mind when reading the chapters. What we have instead is a hybrid, as Phelan has noted so succinctly in his rhetorical theory of narrative; somebody is not merely telling that “something happened,” they are also telling that “someone is” (*Experiencing Fiction* 153).

The relevant question is then: to what rhetorical purpose this progression, this change, these judgments, in the greater project of McCann's serial narrative? The progression of the funambulist's story is carried through all three chapters, and ends with the successful conclusion of his walk between the towers. The progression is similar to portraiture in that it leans heavily on the mini-narratives and the accounts that are reported of the funambulist's life before the walk. However, not only is there the obvious event of the walk between the towers, there is a change in the character of the funambulist which is carried through the progression, as he has achieved a major goal after having carried through with his dream. The purpose of such a minimal progression in the larger narrative rhetoric of the novel can be seen in the contribution these three chapters make to the revelations of the other characters present in their own chapters. Put simply, the funambulist's story demonstrates the passing of time, the occurrence of a publicly shared event, and the evolution of one soul among many in New York City. If this particular character and story were absent from the serial narrative, the reader would not have such occasion to witness the ethical position of the other characters in regard to a single shared event, thus offering the possibility of comparison. Thus, the rhetorical function of the funambulist has to be that of an aesthetic tool, as well as an ethical mirror for other characters to use as well as for readers to judge.

Moving on to precisely those judgments, one of the threads, or perhaps even tensions, in the book that helps to bind the serial narrative together are the various characters' responses to the man up in the air. While we see that many, like Claire, are troubled by someone who takes their own life for granted, the chapters regarding the funambulist enlighten the reader as to why one would pursue such a task. In the beginning of his walk he ponders:

The core reason for it all was beauty. Walking was a divine delight. Everything was rewritten when he was up in the air. New things were possible with the human form. It went beyond equilibrium.

He felt for a moment uncreated. Another kind of awake. (164)

This feeling that the funambulist embodies, up on the wire, alone, is striking when compared to other feelings of epiphany in the novel, as experienced by other characters. Jaslyn describes her own feelings regarding her existence, "We stumble on, [...], bring a little noise into the silence, find in others the ongoing of ourselves. It is almost enough" (349). The ability of the funambulist to walk where it is difficult or impossible seen in contrast to the other characters while they "stumble" through life is poignant, yet shows the similarities between the ethical positions of very different characters. Claire, Jaslyn, Gloria, and Lara, if not all of the other

characters, are all persistently attempting to push forward through difficult situations; something they share with the funambulist. Furthermore, all of the characters are depicted as rather alone. Most of them have someone to talk to, but their reflections reveal a solitary existence, even in New York City with its millions of people. Thematically, this also gives reason to add rhetorical weight to judgments stemming from this shared experience (the sighting of the funambulist) when revealed through the serial narrative. The judgments, varying from positive to negative, serve to bind together many different elements, and the revelation of the character of the funambulist through his thoughts on the wire serve to reinforce those judgments, or to persuade the reader otherwise. Thinking back to the first part of my problem statement regarding the aesthetic role that a character can fulfill, the unnamed tightrope walker is an excellent example of that role. He has both ethical uses as well as traditional narrative uses, all provoking judgments from the reader.

It would be oversimplifying the case to write off McCann's tightrope walker as an adrenaline junkie of the first degree, as his portrayal unveils an existentialist who is merely exercising the possibilities that feel most true to him. When the narrator describes the practice sessions in the field, we see that he needs to engage with his body and the surrounding nature in this way in order to be fulfilled (158). However, the narrator takes care to acknowledge that the funambulist is aware of the "arrogance" that is implicit in such a hobby (240). This seems almost in direct response to the judgments of Claire and perhaps of some readers who would find fault with the ethics of such a selfish endeavor. At the end of his walk the funambulist is faced with the public's demand to know "Why?" and it becomes evident that in a world of logic and reason, the existential value of such an action was more valid to the funambulist. "He didn't like the idea of why. The towers were there. That was enough" (243).

The narrator encourages judgment in these chapters in two ways: he dutifully reports on the judgments of other witnesses to the event, and he dutifully reports the funambulist's response to those judgments. It would be difficult to observe this exchange without a certain implicit understanding between the reader and the narrator: these are examples of reactions and behaviors, but how would the reader feel if they were in the position of observer, law enforcer, or tightrope walker that day? This is a valid question that also plays upon the "local referentiality" of the topic, or "the presence of historical figures or events" (*Experiencing Fiction* 217). There is no getting away from the fact that this event actually did occur and that the picture in the novel is not fabricated. The narrator functions in the chapters regarding the

funambulist are consistent in their clear report of both the internal world of the funambulist and the reactions of a surprised public to his behavior and stunts. The disclosure functions feel less imperative, as this is a character that obviously plays no central role in a plot, other than as a point of connection, or “collision” (*LGWS* 325). The only disclosure functions that are running at high-speed are set in motion by the photograph, and the readerly knowledge that this was an actual real-life occurrence.

When drawing upon nonfictional events, McCann is enabling a set of judgments that perhaps may have not arisen so quickly otherwise. The World Trade Center is a loaded topic for Americans, as well as other nationalities. After the events of 9/11 it is possible to see the tightrope walk as a different sort of feat, as the collective memory of people leaping head-first to their deaths from the burning towers, in groups or alone, is still fresh in the minds of those who witnessed the event both in person and on television. This is not something that can be avoided, and there is little doubt that a funambulist who is taunting his fate in such a manner from such a position now carries a different ethical weight than before due to this referentiality. This is one of the main elements that suggest the difficulty a reader would have in abstaining from judgment in regard to the funambulist and his actions, thus rendering the judgments and ethical positions of portraiture impossible.

Returning to the question of the rhetorical purpose this progression, this change in character, and the subsequent judgments arising from McCann’s serial narrative: The progression of events in the funambulist’s story, the change that the character undergoes due to his achievement, and the speculative use of local referentiality to provoke a response from, not only the readers, but the other characters in the novel, all help to define these three chapters as narrative hybrids. How these chapters add to the overall ethics and aesthetics of the serial narration is dependent on their effectiveness in guiding the reader towards an ethical position of observer and judge; similar to that of an observer on the street below the World Trade Center. Thus if the portraitures and lyric narratives that comprise *LGWS* are placed strategically to guide the reader towards a successful completion and configuration at the end of the novel, what is the purpose of positioning the reader ethically, and through the use of the story’s aesthetics, as another participant? The simple answer is that the reader needs to be prepared for the completion and final configuration of the novel, and that in order for that to be a satisfactory ending for the reader, as well as the characters, there needs to be appropriate levels of empathy, understanding, and judgment. Without the three chapters entailing the funambulist, the reader would have still been able to assess the temporal situation within the



story world, as well as guessed at the motivations and background of the person behind such a feat. Yet the reader would be left without the rhetorical weight of judgments coming from other characters, as well as from themselves as observers. In those judgments lie components of the parameters of expectation and actual expectations for the rest of the novel.

### ***“Roaring Seaward, and I Go”: Rewarding Rhetoric, Concluding Portraiture***

The final chapter of McCann’s novel takes place in October 2006, notably after the events of 9/11, and after many years have elapsed, thus allowing our characters to have moved past the events portrayed earlier in the novel. In this chapter, the “she” of the portrait is Jaslyn, one of the orphaned daughters of Jazzlyn, and granddaughter of Tillie. While on her way to New York City to see Claire who is now dying, Jaslyn recollects the events that have led to her current situation, and the reader is subsequently rewarded with pieces of information regarding the main characters and their fates. The narrator functions and the disclosure functions are working at full capacity in this chapter to deliver a conclusion that is rhetorically rewarding and, yet, that adequately defines Jaslyn as a character, ensuring that her portraiture is as complete as the others. This is what makes this chapter an enlightening conclusion to the novel, as well as an accurate example of how a serial narrative can be brought to a successful and rewarding rhetorical conclusion after numerous portraitures, a degree of lyric narrative, and surprisingly little plot.

Beginning with the narrator functions and the disclosure functions in this chapter, it can be seen that there are a number of levels of communication working together to bring us to a satisfactory conclusion. The disclosure functions are relevant to the ethics and aesthetics of this serial narrative (again, the ethical aspects of the effects are very apparent), and help to enlighten the reader as to why the concluding chapter is written the way it is. However, it is also important to realize that the elements that make Jaslyn’s chapter a portraiture also contribute to this successful final configuration; most notably those defined by Phelan in his analysis of portraiture:

“portrait narratives ask the authorial audience to remain in the twin roles of observer and judge,” “the author invites us to thematize the character, and, [...], the consequences of that thematizing for our ethical and aesthetic judgments,” “progressions in portrait narratives often depend upon the introduction of a global tension that must be resolved before completeness can be achieved,” and “just as lyric

narratives can synthesize principles of narrativity and lyricality in different ways so too can portrait narratives.” (*Experiencing Fiction* 179)

Though it may seem redundant to focus once again on such a list of characteristics, it serves our analytical purposes well when assessing the conclusion of McCann’s novel; every one of these aspects is present and used in a noteworthy fashion.

Beginning with the narrator functions and disclosure functions; they are most easily demonstrated by the following passage which takes place when Jaslyn meets Pino, a charming Italian man, on the airplane. After he tells her about his background as a doctor in the Ninth Ward in New Orleans, he asks her a very open question:

- What about you?

What can she tell him? That she comes from a long line of hookers, that her grandmother died in a prison cell, that she and her sister were adopted, grew up in Poughkeepsie, their mother Gloria went around the house singing bad opera? That she got sent to Yale, while her sister chose to join the army? That she was in the theater department and that she failed to make it? That she changed her name from Jazzlyn to Jaslyn? That it wasn’t from shame, not from shame at all? That Gloria said there was no such thing as shame, that life was about a refusal to be shamed? (329)

First, when the narrator function of this passage is analyzed, the information that Jaslyn is relaying to the authorial audience is significant in tidying up some of the instabilities of the overall progression. She very effectively summarizes everything that has surpassed since her adoption so that the reader now has a vivid and detailed timeline to add to their reconfiguration. However, through disclosure functions, Jaslyn’s situation serves as grounds for her hesitation regarding the making of acquaintances, represented here by Pino, who has a notably positive ethos. He is seen as someone who is harmless, as having a sense of humor as well as job that is rewarding and ethically positive. Yet Jaslyn’s hesitation is well-founded, as her past is troubling, though through no fault of her own. All of this is confirmed in the passage, as the narrator function enables us to understand Jaslyn, as she sits on the plane, contemplating the “shame” that many would worry she carried with her on her journeys through life. Then the disclosure function makes it possible to see this passage in a greater perspective, since the reader now has firm knowledge of the resolutions of instabilities that were merely hinted at previously: Tillie did die in prison, Gloria did adopt the girls, and that this Jaslyn is actually the daughter of Jazzlyn who named her after herself.

Jaslyn’s enlightening passage also illustrates the elements of portraiture that help the reader reach their final configuration in this final chapter. The authorial audience, who

actively embraces both the narrator functions and the disclosure functions, can actively take on both roles of observer and judge when approaching Jaslyn's words. It is not too difficult to observe the factual background information of Jaslyn's past and then to observe how she views her own history as nothing to be ashamed of. Yet it is also very obvious, and the disclosure functions aid the reader in this, that Jaslyn will not be recounting her challenging beginnings to Pino on this particular flight, and that this is where readerly judgments can come in. The reader is able to judge the ethical position of Jaslyn, as a daughter who harbors no ill-will or shame for her biological family, and as a woman who decides not to disclose this "wild ancestry" to a new acquaintance (328). At the same time, the reader can contemplate and judge Jaslyn's reluctance to open up to a person who is obviously non-menacing. Any preliminary parameters of expectation and/or actual expectations that the reader makes regarding Jaslyn's behavior are obviously open to reconfiguration later in the chapter. As Jaslyn's life is recounted in mini-narratives embedded throughout her journey, the reader learns of her fears regarding her potential biological inheritance, or her fear "that she would find herself too much in love with love" (333).

This passage also demonstrates a thematic component to Jaslyn's character which, in turn, will affect the reader's ethical judgments as well as aesthetic judgments regarding, not only Jaslyn as character, but also the conclusion of the novel. To read that the little girls who had been living in such squalid conditions in the Bronx were able to grow up in a safe neighborhood in Poughkeepsie with a mother whose greatest fault was a bad singing voice is a wonderful ending, yet it is being used as the beginning of Jaslyn's chapter. The theme of redemption is thoroughly present in McCann's novel, and here at its conclusion the questions seem to be: Redemption for what purpose? Redemption without shame? These questions will affect readerly judgments and the resolution of Jaslyn's chapter will hinge upon her acknowledgment of these questions and how she addresses them. Then the readers will see her ethical position clearly, and be able to enjoy the successful conclusion of the narrative. This is vital to the progression of the novel, due to the use of portraiture, in that the instabilities that are introduced need to be resolved in order for the revelation of character to be achieved.

All of this analysis can help to define the specific ethics and aesthetics of this serial narration. The ethical positions are adequately described via the intricate tapestry of character narratives, lyric narratives, and the narrator functions and disclosure functions within them. At

the very beginning of the chapter, Jaslyn reflects on the photograph she constantly carries with her, which, it is important to note, is the same as printed on page 237 of *LGWS*:

A man high in the air while a plane disappears, it seems, into the edge of the building. One small scrap of history meeting a larger one. As if the walking man were somehow anticipating what would come later. The intrusion of time and history. The collision point of stories. (325)

It is easy to see this “collision point” on a number of levels in Jaslyn’s concluding chapter, as a serial narrative is going to need some type of meeting point in order to tie together so many different characters. Not only is the funambulist and his trip between the towers a meeting point, there are also the meeting points between characters that give greater purpose to the serial narrative’s aesthetics, and as revealed by the final configurations made possible by Jaslyn’s revelations, and her personal ethics as well. This collision point can also be applied to the recurring concept of the ethical aspect of the effects of the functions; in both the aesthetic role a character can play outside of the mimetic, thematic, and synthetic, as well as the ethical role they inhabit in the parameters of expectations and/or actual expectations. It truly is “one small scrap of history meeting a larger one” (325).

On the final page of the novel, as Jaslyn lies next to Claire who is dying at home in her own bed on Park Avenue, she reflects, “The person we know at first, she thinks, is not the one we know at last” (349). Reflections like this are littered throughout the chapter, but it is this final thought that accurately defines the outcome of the novel. The characters that are defined in each chapter of the novel are new and evolved versions of themselves that the reader meets at the conclusion. It is, in the end, the reader’s apprehending the characters and reconfiguring their original assessments of character and situation that is at the heart of the novel.

Jaslyn’s portraiture, as a conclusion to the serial narrative, does not come in lieu of progression, but develops another addition to this progression in the form of character revelation, introduces and solves an instability regarding Jaslyn’s meeting with the Italian man, as well as solves any remaining global instabilities. Thus, the “something happened” is tidied up in the same way that the “someone is” is explained. The collaboration between the reader and the narrator are contingent on this coming together of sorts for the three levels of narrative (narrativity, lyricality, and portraiture) that have worked so closely together throughout McCann’s novel. Also occurring at this point, the reader’s configurations absorb the referentiality of the novel, enabling judgments, of both the ethics of the novel and the aesthetics of the novel, to come to the surface. All of this combines to make a very telling

example of a successful conclusion for a serial novel. Every level of narrativity is demonstrated as useful and relevant in the final chapter. The reader experiences closure regarding any instabilities that were left open, as well being encouraged to remember the engaging lyrical chapter of Tillie, in order to apply the themes and rhetoric from her telling to Jaslyn's telling. Without Jaslyn's portraiture, one that takes place long after prior events in the story world, there would be a lack of closure regarding the fates of all of the characters. Hints just won't do in such a compelling novel. Though we can assume and guess at which paths diverse characters will choose to follow, it is more satisfactory for a reader to face whole truths at the end of a novel, not just half promises.

The primary objective of this chapter was to look into Colum McCann's novel in order to see what service the various chapters performed, and what types of judgments could be made regarding the characters, the plot, and the aesthetic/ethical relationship. The ethics of the telling were shown to be used in satisfactory ways, though different from chapter to chapter. The most important factor for McCann's success was that each one of his narratives encouraged collaboration, empathy, and ultimately, a satisfactory final configuration in Jaslyn's final chapter. Most notably here, lyric narratives and portraitures both demonstrated unique qualities that added a new ethical dimension to a serial narrative. The relevant points that McCann's novel offered upon close analysis were:

- (1) Lyric narrative, as we have seen it applied here, adds an ethical dimension that is capable of producing empathy much more quickly than building a case around a single character over hundreds of pages. Tillie's detailed account stays with the reader and sets a tone of understanding and compassion for a character who is well aware of their faults. This lyric narrative enables a shared perspective between the narrator and the reader, which is reinforced by the emotive force of such a compelling story.
- (2) Portraiture, in this serial narrative, adds to the progression in that the revelation of character becomes a tool for the revelation of a story world and its inhabitants.
- (3) The reader's ethical response to both of the above is an important factor when judging the aesthetic and the ethical factors of the novel that they feel are successful. Because McCann's is a successful lyric narrative, the reader can adopt a new perspective and postpone judgment for a short time in order to participate in Tillie's reality. In the sections written as portraiture,

the reader remains as an observer and makes continuous judgments. However, those judgments help the reader to comprehend the characters (Lara, Jaslyn, the funambulist) from their own ethical position as flesh-and-blood reader. When portraiture and lyric narrative follow each other closely through a novel, the possibility of their complimentary relationship benefitting the reader's ethical configurations and aesthetic judgments of the novel is great.

Taking into account the points listed above, the comprehension and judgment of McCann's characters, while at the same time comprehending and judging the aesthetic functions they serve in the novel is a surmountable task. McCann writes and creates a story world that enables that level of understanding. While the ethical and the aesthetic are situated near each other in the rhetorical theory of narrative, it is now also safe to say that the characters can contribute to that same binary relationship: a character's mode of telling, with its narrator functions and disclosure functions, is hard to separate from the character's larger role within a novel. How and when a character is telling something is closely related to the content of what they are telling. The use of portraiture and lyric in McCann's novel, while proving to be a very interesting literary device both aesthetically and ethically, adds to this thesis on a few levels.

Putting these ideas into the larger puzzle of this analysis with a look at how they may be applied to the problem statement: (1) McCann's characters are being used as tools for ethical rhetoric because of their aesthetic roles outside of the mere mimetic, synthetic, and thematic; they are simultaneously conveying ethical positions that provoke empathy while using the telling functions to move the story along (most notably through the use of lyric narrative); (2) The telling functions are working well in McCann's novel and leading the reader into a collaboration of understanding the specific ethics of each character, and (3) The progression of the story is relevant to the comprehension of the ethics of the story as the character-character relations evolve.

It is safe to assume that each of the concepts listed above are not solely unique to McCann's novel. In the next chapter there will be an opportunity to see if these rhetorical qualities can be found in a text with fewer narrators.

## CHAPTER FOUR: A CASE OF INTERWOVEN ETHICS

### *Freedom* by Jonathan Franzen

*“Characters aren’t interesting if they are behaving well. If they are nice people behaving well...who wants to read a book like that?”<sup>17</sup>*

A case study of characters’ ethical positions, as well as the link between the ethical and the aesthetic within narrative is a fruitful endeavor when analyzing Jonathan Franzen’s novel, *Freedom*. It is a recent novel with characters, settings and dilemmas that are current, and thus serves as a close mirror to American society today. The characters face the same problems and issues that many Americans are confronted with on a regular basis, prompting discussions about family, the environment, and what it means to be free. This could have been a monumental feat for any number of authors; however, judging from the response from the literary world, it seems that Franzen was successful in his attempt. This success could have stemmed from the audience’s positive reception of the family and its thematic encounters; but I would argue that the aesthetic structure of the novel, its ‘autobiographical’ sections especially, drew the readers into the story world in a manner that was especially compelling and unavoidably rewarding.

*Freedom* is a narrative of a family, the Berglunds, attempting to navigate life in America with its inherent freedoms and inevitable constraints. The portrait of Walter and Patty’s marriage, with its successes and failures, is poignant and relevant. Beginning the novel in St. Paul, Minnesota, the Berglund’s story begins with a look at their arrival in an up-and-coming suburb, and their questionable successes as ideal neighbors. As the progression of the novel picks up pace, the characters’ histories are developed, the family relocates to Washington, D.C., and the reasons for the seemingly incoherent situation the Berglunds have landed in become more and more apparent. When the novel takes a thematic turn towards issues outside of the home, namely conservationism and American society as a whole, it is done with deft precision and tact, always revolving around the Berglund family and its negotiations with these forces.

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<sup>17</sup> From a transcript of my conversation with Jonathan Franzen on 18 October 2010.

As the various chapters of *Freedom* progress, it becomes increasingly clear that the characters are more nuanced and complex than upon their first introduction. Due to the well-crafted evolutions they undergo, the novel makes a great case study in rhetorical theory through an assessment of the ethics of the told and the telling. I will examine the novel to see exactly how the Berglunds and their story world relate to Phelan's ethical positions. Stated once again here for ease of reference, the two ethical positions relevant to this analysis are:

1) that of the characters within the story world; how they behave – and judge others – is inescapably tied up with ethics; 2) that of the narrator in relation to the telling, to the told, and to the audience (Phelan, *Living to Tell* 23)

While assessing the rhetoric of these characters, an awareness of the symbiotic relationship between all of the ethical positions Phelan identifies is necessary, and so neither the narrator, the implied author, nor the flesh-and-blood reader will be completely absent from this assessment. What may seem absent from this assessment at times is a more comprehensive ethical assessment of Walter Berglund. This is partly due to the fact that, from an aesthetic perspective, *Freedom* is truly Patty's story. She is the character that binds everyone else together, and the sole character given a narratorial task. Thus the discussion regarding her role is lengthier than Walter's.

Originally, my intent was to focus solely on the ethics of the told, or the very first ethical position Phelan identifies, in regard to this novel as the characters are such interesting case studies. What became apparent after further analysis was that, while this novel encourages an explicit look into the characters' ethical positions, it is impossible to ignore the unique uses of the telling functions, or ethics of the telling as Franzen applies them. Therefore, this chapter's relevance to the thesis as a whole is of a high value and can be summarized in three points as they correlate to the three levels of my problem statement: (1) Franzen's characters are fulfilling the aesthetic roles of ethical tools, as discussed in previous chapters; (2) the parameters of expectation and the actual expectations that stem from the novel's telling functions continuously keep the reader in close collaboration with the character's ethical positions, as dubious as they may be; (3) the relationships between the characters take a forefront role (this is a social novel after all) in the ethical aspect of the story, yet the full comprehension of the characters is reliant upon not only the telling functions but the progression of the story as a whole.

Moving on to the different sections of this chapter; "The Beginning" will give an introduction to the two ethical positions in regard to the very beginning of the novel, then



focus more intently on the ethics of the told, or character – character relations in the narrative. It will also touch upon the aesthetics of the text and the global instability of the story. “The Middle” will explore the ethics of the telling, including both the narrator’s relations to the characters, the task of narrating, and the audience; enabling a continuation in the development of the patterns of ambiguity and objectivity that are vital to our discussion. Finally, this chapter will conclude with “The Ending,” an analysis of the characters’ ethical evolutions from ambiguous presences to clearly represented and empathetic entities in regard to the other characters as well as the authorial audience.<sup>18</sup> By approaching the text via its own aesthetic progression, it is possible to see the evolution of the characters, as that is where the relevant evidence regarding my problem statement lies.

Some of the questions that will hopefully be answered, or at least clarified for further inquiry, include: How does the ethical and aesthetic progression of the story contribute in order for the authorial audience to reach a satisfying configuration at the end of the novel? How is Franzen, the implied author, provoking our collaboration in this story if he is using methods other than selective disclosure? Most importantly, is this novel really a recipe for empathy?

### ***The Beginning: “Good Neighbors”***

As stated above, this section will introduce the two ethical positions in regard to the very beginning of the discourse, then focus more intently on the ethics of the told, or character – character relations in the narrative. It will also touch upon the aesthetics of the text as well as the global instability of the story.

Beginning the novel with what Lev Grossman referred to as an “overture” regarding the place of the Berglund family in their neighborhood, and their subsequent fall from grace, was an interesting aesthetic choice on Franzen’s part. In “Good Neighbors” we are introduced to Walter and Patty Berglund, their children Joey and Jessica, as well as the various neighbors of Ramsey Hill. This beginning serves some important purposes: it introduces all of the relevant characters (with the notable exemption of Richard Katz, a friend of Walter as well as lover of Patty), it sets up some parameters of expectation, and it emphasizes the importance of

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<sup>18</sup> The terms used to define the various stages of progression in the novel, such as “Beginning,” “Middle,” and “Ending” are utilized as per Phelan’s definitions in *Experiencing Fiction*. For a helpful chart detailing the various elements that contribute to the aesthetic progression in fictions see p.21 in that work.

noting both the ethical positions of the characters as well as the aesthetic presentation of those ethics.

To better understand how these three points are accomplished let us take a careful look at the ethics of the told and the telling present in the narrative. The first paragraph of the novel is especially useful for analysis, as key ethical positions are present in what is clearly a combination of exposition and the subsequent launch, or introduction of instability, in the beginning section of the narrative.<sup>19</sup>

“The news about Walter Berglund wasn’t picked up locally – he and Patty had moved away to Washington two years earlier and meant nothing to St. Paul now – but the urban gentry of Ramsey Hill were not so loyal to their city as not to read the *New York Times*. According to a long and very unflattering story in the *Times*, Walter had made quite a mess of his professional life out there in the nation’s capital. His old neighbors had some difficulty reconciling the quotes about him in the *Times* (“arrogant,” “high-handed,” “ethically compromised”) with the generous, smiling, red-faced 3M employee they remembered pedaling his commuter bicycle up Summit Avenue in February snow; it seemed strange that Walter, who was greener than Greenpeace and whose own roots were rural, should be in trouble now for conniving with the coal industry and mistreating country people. Then again, there had always been something not quite right about the Berglunds.” (3)

The first ethical position to analyze is that of the relations between characters or the “ethics of the told” (Phelan, *Experiencing Fiction* 11). In the opening paragraph, it is clearly shown what the *New York Times* and the former neighbors are thinking about the Berglunds. The reader is shown the confusion that seems to have struck the neighborhood of Ramsey Hill regarding the evolution of Walter Berglund from environmentally conscious neighbor to one who is “conniving” and “mistreating.” Conspicuously absent from this opening is the reciprocal assessment from the Berglunds of their neighbors and the article. This is a common thread throughout “Good Neighbors,” as it details actions, behaviors, and even motivations to a certain extent, yet gives no access to the internal monologues of the Berglund family. Later in “Good Neighbors” it is possible to learn more about the Berglunds’ ethical positions in relation to their neighbors through reports of their actions and words. This is helpful, yet here in the very first paragraph, the confusion and doubtful nature surrounding any assessment of the Berglunds true ethics is shared by not only the characters but the reader as well.

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<sup>19</sup> Terms such as “launch” and “exposition” also stem from James Phelan’s *Experiencing Fiction* where they are used throughout. There is a helpful graph on p. 20 of that work detailing the various levels of progression and how they can be seen in as segments of a greater whole.

Regarding the second ethical position, or ethics of the telling (the narrator and their relation to the characters, the implied author, and the audience); the paragraph ends with the observation that though Walter had always appeared ethically and morally flawless, “there had always been something not quite right” about him and his family. This report comes from the narrator and could be seen as an example of free indirect discourse. If read too quickly, it is also possible to attribute this statement to the neighborhood’s collective consciousness as described throughout the middle of the paragraph. However, this is just an example of narrator functions reporting exactly what the instability of the story is going to revolve around. What exactly is the “something not quite right about the Berglunds?” Another helpful hint that comes through to the reader via the disclosure functions at work in this paragraph is the idea that the reader may also have some “difficulty reconciling” the evolution of Walter and his family. Both of these concepts are helping to construct the necessary initial parameters of expectation and actual expectations.

Throughout the introductory paragraph it is evident that the narrator has an ethical position similar to the neighbors of Ramsey Hill. This ethical position is made clear through the reporting and evaluating the narrator provides. However, in this preliminary paragraph the narrator is using the disclosure functions to hint at the direction of the novel and its global instability. Through the use of the telling functions, particularly the disclosure functions in this case, the narrator is giving us a clear idea of what to expect from the rest of “Good Neighbors” as a chapter. The limit of the narrator’s focalization, an internal heterodiegetic narration, enables our insights to come solely through those characters outside of the Berglund family, and contributes to the ambiguous notion of the Berglunds. They are represented both as good neighbors, but also as a questionable entity with dubious motives. Without any first-person or internal dialogue given, the reader’s aesthetic judgment will arise from this rather superficial meeting, and it may be, well, superficial. This potential judgment of superficiality, complicated by the limited parameters of expectation, guides our initial judgments. The label applied by Phelan to this type of narration is “restricted narration” which “requires the authorial audience to infer communication from the author beyond what the narrator tells the narratee” (*Living to Tell* 29). While the examples that Phelan gives to define this type of narration are to demonstrate the difference between a narrator that could be deemed unreliable versus a narrator that “does not interpret or evaluate [events]” for the reader, it is helpful to use the definition in its basic sense, as “narration that records events” (29).

“Good Neighbors” is much more than its opening paragraph, and while it is useful to introduce some of the ethics of the told and the telling through the dissection of that segment of text, a continuing analysis of the remainder of the chapter is useful. The rest of this section will focus primarily on the first ethical position, that of character-character relations and its relation to the aesthetics of the text, as well as the global instability of the story.

The ethics of the told, regarding our characters and their relations amongst themselves, becomes clearer when the characters are given more depth. Patty’s ethical position, the neighbors’ ethical position, and finally, Walter’s ethical position will be briefly reviewed here. It is important to once again note that “Good Neighbors” is an internal heterodiegetic narrative. This is interesting because of the lack of omniscience in regard to the Berglunds themselves, while a seemingly unproblematic focal access is granted to the neighbors. This also makes the ethics of the telling inseparable from the ethics of the told.

First, there is a fair amount of description regarding Patty’s neighborly attributes via the narrator’s conveyance of the opinions of “most people” (5). By relaying the neighborhood’s supposed opinions to define Patty somewhat inconsistently, it becomes difficult to sort between the character-to-character relations and the narrator’s ethics in regard to Patty’s description. Patty is seen as a “resource” by her neighbors and then is described as someone who wouldn’t speak ill of others, only calling them “weird” if faced with the need to place a semi-negative judgment on someone’s questionable behavior (5-6). Patty wins over most neighbors with cookie-baking, and the charming of the local children, the telling of self-deprecating anecdotes, yet “Merrie Paulsen wasn’t entertained by Patty’s storytelling” (8). To Merrie, “it was obvious that the only things that mattered to her were her children and her house – *not* her neighbors, *not* the poor, *not* her country, *not* her parents, not even her own husband” (8). This is an important ethical position, one that relates the main weaknesses of Patty’s ethos amongst the neighborhood.<sup>20</sup> The falseness that Merrie implies as a key factor in Patty’s behavior taints the positive behavior that has been reported previously. Within this chapter, this serves as a key turning point. Patty goes on to lose her son to her more conservative neighbors, reacting quite violently by slashing tires, while beginning to drink heavily and provoking a level of alienation previously unexpected from such a “resource.” Patty’s ethical position goes from a perceived level of good to a pitiful bad. However, the disclosure functions utilized by the narrator hint that she may have been provoked.

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<sup>20</sup> For further discussion regarding ethos and narrators, see Ruth Amossy’s essay, “*Ethos* at the Crossroads of Disciplines: Rhetoric, Pragmatics, Sociology.”

Seth Paulsen's opinion of the Berglunds was that they were "the super-guilty sort of liberals who needed to forgive everybody so their own good fortune could be forgiven; who lacked the courage of their privilege" (7). This observation is stated before the report of their social downfall, and also serves as an example of an ethical position potentially represented by other neighbors in the community, including Carol Monaghan and her daughter Connie, later joined by Carol's boyfriend Blake. The Monaghan's are reported as the one exception to the gentrification of Ramsey Hill, as they are renting a home under circumstances clouded by the illegitimacy of Carol's child, who was fathered by a prominent politician and remains merely an anonymous monetary figure in the novel. Carol Monaghan as described by the narrator: "She smoked Parliaments, bleached her hair, made lurid talons of her nails, fed her daughter heavily processed foods, and came home very late on Thursday nights" (6). This portrait offered by the narrator, whose implied ethical relation to Carol's lifestyle could be described as condescending, goes hand in hand with the character's ethical stances regarding Carol as well. Initially, Patty refuses to take sides in a neighborhood rivalry between the Paulsens and Carol (regarding the flicking of cigarette butts into a child's wading pool) but when Carol transforms herself and acquires Blake, a handyman who builds what Patty refers to as a "hangar" onto the back of Carol's house, becoming an eyesore for the Berglund's, Patty begins to pass judgment and her ethical position in regard to Carol becomes glaringly obvious (18-19). Patty's ranting, as she makes inquiries amongst her other neighbors, includes the questions, "How can this person get a mortgage? Doesn't she have Victoria's Secret bills to pay? How is she even allowed to have a boyfriend?" (18) The ethical position Patty reveals is one of an assumed moral superiority, granting Carol neither economic license nor romantic license, merely posing her as an avid consumer of lingerie, with the morality that that sort of habit would imply. An interesting point of this narrative though is that this does not really vilify Patty in the reader's judgments, as Carol is subsequently described as "loud and somewhat gloating" when Joey defects to her home and she has the honor of informing the neighborhood of her parental victory over the Berglunds (22).

The narrator delivers a succinct summary of the situation shortly after Joey moves next-door to the Monaghan's and Patty loses it:

"[...] the fact remained that Carol Monaghan had never been well liked on Barrier Street, Blake was widely deplored, Connie was thought spooky, and nobody had ever really trusted Joey. As word of his insurrection spread, the emotions prevailing among the Ramsey Hill gentry were pity for Walter, anxiety about Patty's psychological

health, and an overwhelming sense of relief and gratitude at how normal their own children were [...]" (24)

Here, the ethical positioning of the neighborhood characters is seen clearly illustrated. An interesting consequence of this description, one could even say of the entire chapter's depiction of the situation, is that the reader is segued into an ethical position similar to that of the unnamed neighbors. The "overwhelming sense of relief and gratitude" is just as likely to be experienced by a reader of the story as it is to be experienced by a neighbor who hears the story related by a character close to the action. As the authorial audience takes cues from the quick character summary offered, it is possible to guess what sort of ethical positions and configurations this text will demand in later chapters. The authorial audience can thus safely continue in their position as observers from a safe distance, using their own relief and gratitude as signs that there is a safe enough distance between themselves and the characters that they can be objective and develop empathy. This ethical position taken by the authorial audience can be seen as product of the "restricted narration" defined earlier, as well as a compelling example of the reader functioning as a "judicious spectator."<sup>21</sup>

By the end of the chapter, when the Paulsen's, as well as the collective "everybody" passes judgment on Walter Berglund, the ethical positioning becomes even more complex. "And everybody had the sense, fairly or not, that Walter – his niceness – was somehow to blame" (26). Walter is continually represented as a likeable guy, and his "niceness" is a recurring theme, however detrimental it may be (21). As the novel progresses, Walter's niceness becomes a burden, and, when seen in retrospect after the authorial audience's final configuration, a theme that is introduced as an instability in the opening chapter. To bring the authorial audience around to the mindset that a normally ethically strong position, one of niceness or kindness, can hold negative value is an interesting feat. Yet it is necessary in order to demonstrate the ambiguity of Walter's ethics. He is too nice for his own good, for Patty's well-being, for his children's upbringing, and for a number of other mostly non-punishable offences. However, if the narrator's aim is to provoke an interest and an objective awareness of the faults inherent in such niceness, Walter must be seen as doubtful or ambiguous.

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<sup>21</sup> Martha Nussbaum uses Adam Smith's term and claims that he defines "the ideal moral point of view" as "a viewpoint rich in feeling" and "a result of [the spectator's] active, concrete imagining of the circumstances and aims and feelings of others" (338). Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* from 1759 is a captivating work, yet the commentary provided by Martha Nussbaum in *Love's Knowledge* is more than substantial for our purposes.

The type of ambiguity displayed by Walter is concurrent with the first of the types discussed in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* by William Empson. Empson writes that “‘Ambiguity’ itself can mean an indecision as to what you mean, an intention to mean several things, a probability that one or other or both of two things has been meant, and the fact that a statement has several meanings” (24). Walter’s place is amongst the “first-type ambiguities” which “arise when a detail is effective in several ways at once, e.g. by comparisons with several points of likeness, antitheses with several points of difference [...], ‘comparative’ adjectives, subdued metaphors, and extra meanings suggested by rhythm”, stems from his characteristics being compared against the other characters in the story (5). Also present in Franzen’s text are the narrative devices that Empson states “leave it to the reader vaguely to invent something, and make him leave it at the back of his mind”, prompting ambiguity that the reader carries with them throughout the story (43). Therefore, when I am using the term “ambiguous” to describe Walter and his ethical position, as well as the ethics of the narrator and the other character, I call upon the full meaning as developed by the three ideas above: ‘ambiguous’ elements call multiple meanings into play, all the meanings are effective in their own way, and the reader’s inventions and ideas in regard to this ambiguity are key to interpreting the story. Put simply: Walter’s niceness has multiple meanings, each is valid for the story’s interpretation, and the reader will carry these ideas throughout the story, thus affecting their final configuration.

This beginning analysis of the character – character ethics, as well as the aesthetic aspects of the narrative that underscore their importance, demonstrates that key ethical stances, ones like niceness or neighborliness, that normally earn respect and admiration, become punishable offences. The ethical positions of the neighbors are made quite clear: they distrust the Berglunds, regardless of how hard Patty and Walter work at being “good” neighbors, so that when they fail miserably as a family and as neighbors, it comes as no surprise. The ethical positions are underscoring the parameters of expectation as well as the actual expectations. This once again raises the all-important question posed at the beginning of the chapter: Who are the good neighbors?

Without having established exactly who the “good” neighbors are, it is difficult to establish which of the characters has the preferred ethical position in the story. In the case of “Good Neighbors,” the ethics of the telling and the told help the reader to share the same ethical position as the narrator. This is because the heterodiegetic report coming from outside the story, with direct commentary on the action, uses both the telling functions and the

disclosure functions to guide the reader into the ethics and aesthetic of the narrative. The exposition, launch, and initiation all encourage the authorial audience to share an ethical position with the narrator, or perhaps the implied author, rather than the characters which are depicted. It is a convenient position for the reader to take, and one that enables a rhetorical configuration to take place later in the text. With the beginning of the narrative brought to a completion, the authorial audience has had a thorough exposition of the characters, one that includes the ambiguities and instabilities which will drive the action of the story forward. Yet perhaps most importantly, the authorial audience has understood the initiation of the beginning, and its parameters of expectation in regard to later ethical judgments of the characters in the story.

To shortly summarize the accomplishments of “Good Neighbors”: the rhetoric of the text becomes more apparent when the analysis of the character-character ethics demonstrates an ambiguous group of figures, who are compelling, if not immediately likeable, while at the same time giving the authorial audience important cues through the disclosure functions and their effects. Franzen’s characters are fulfilling the aesthetic roles of ethical tools, the parameters of expectation that stem from the novel’s telling functions have been set and are keeping the reader in close collaboration with the character’s ethical positions, and the relationships between the characters have been detailed to an extent that it is now possible to for the story to build upon and progress from these ethical positions. The next aesthetic move the novel makes is of special interest then, as the authorial audience must quickly negotiate the ethics of a new narrator, Patty.

### ***The Middle: “Mistakes Were Made”, The Ethics of the Telling***

Conveniently, Franzen’s novel is divided into five sections, arranged symmetrically, so that in between “Good Neighbors” and the concluding “Canterbridge Estates Lake” there are three sections: “Mistakes Were Made: Autobiography of Patty Berglund (Composed at Her Therapist’s Suggestion),” “2004,” and “Mistakes Were Made (Conclusion): A Sort of Letter to Her Reader by Patty Berglund.” By the end of this middle section there are three points that have been achieved: 1) through the use of Patty as the narrator of her own downfall, the authorial audience learns of Patty’s mistakes as well as her ethical position through first, a narrative that is not meant to be read, and second, a narrative of repentance, 2) the actual expectations that stem from Patty’s two narratives are effective in provoking a collaboration



between herself and the reader, and 3) the ethics of the telling and the told, through the progression of the novel, as well as the development of the overall themes of freedom and competition, have guided the authorial audience towards a desire for a positive outcome to befall Patty and the other characters. Each of these points contributes to this middle section of the novel as a fertile place for characters to develop into their own particular ethical role while also affecting the aesthetics of the novel.

To begin with the first point, the pertinent sections are the two titles beginning with “Mistakes Were Made.” The titles themselves reveal the level of insight Patty and the implied author are attempting to convey to the readers. However, with Patty as the narrator writing in third-person, the ethics of the telling must be at the forefront of this analysis, since it presents the reader with her own motivations and insights, though in a somewhat mediated form. If the reader is to merely judge Patty, as well as Walter, an objective presentation like the one in “Good Neighbors” is helpful, but if we are to understand and feel a connection with these characters, more insight is necessary. While reading Patty’s autobiographical discourse, and looking at the narrator’s position in regard to the other characters, the task of narrating, as well as the audience, it is possible to see how the ethical position of the authorial audience may be swayed from a formerly objective standpoint to one of more understanding, or sympathy. The telling functions are used here as Patty reports in a very matter-of-fact tone, leaving in details that do nothing to earn her either sympathy or condemnation. Yet the disclosure functions in this section spur an incredible amount of information that is vital in not only understanding Patty’s motivations, but also for the actual expectations needed in order for a satisfactory conclusion at the end of the novel.

A comparison of the two sections is necessary as they vary in two key elements: who they are speaking to and how they speak. The first section is written as an exercise “Composed at Her Therapist’s Suggestion” (27). First, according to Patty, it was supposedly written without an audience in mind, though it does make direct appeals and statements to an audience throughout. Second, Patty as a narrator is a harsh critic and a keen documenter of wrong-doings in this section. Later, in the second “Mistakes”, the authorial audience is addressed by a Patty that is searching for a level of atonement that she knows is impossible to acquire, thus her judgments of others are markedly less harsh. This could also be the result of the second section’s true purpose, as a document written exclusively for Walter to read. Both of Patty’s autobiographical sections are prominent examples of two points made by Phelan in *Living to Tell*: “*Authorial disposition* refers to the narrator’s awareness of himself or herself

as a storyteller.[...] *Self-consciousness* refers to the narrator's awareness of his or her agency in crafting the effects of the narration" (103).

The first "Mistakes" section introduces Patty as a narrator, who is writing her autobiography in the third-person, which is a curious device, yet this aesthetic structure helps to define the narrator's self-consciousness as well as Patty's ethical position extremely clearly. This aesthetic format also helps to generate a kind of distance that is ethically interesting. Patty acknowledges that she is the woman being presented in the discourse, and also refers repeatedly to herself as "the autobiographer" (31). In "Chapter one: Agreeable" Patty presents her family background, the rape that underscored the divide between herself and her immediate relatives, and her subsequent departure for college. Patty relates critically and consistently what she found to be problematic in that period of her life (competition in and outside of her family, feelings of invisibility to her parents). Patty's description of her family comes from a very judgmental ethical position, where Patty sees herself as the ethical norm and her family's behavior seen as eccentric and disconnected from reality. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the pages describing Patty's rape and the subsequent hush campaign run by her parents. This is one of the key points where the narrator, Patty, the character, Patty, and the authorial reader are all in an ethical position that is directly opposite the position taken by Patty's parents. This position that really binds everyone together is the commonly held belief that rape is wrong, and those who rape must be prosecuted in a court of law. By aligning all the morally positive ethical positions with Patty's, there is finally a very evident example in Patty's parents of what is not "good". With this established, the reader can be encouraged then to see Patty as representative of the ethically good side of at least one situation. Patty becomes more than just a mimetic, synthetic, and thematic character. Patty becomes a character conveying an ethical position of despair and confusion in a world that doesn't always follow the rules as she understood them. She then uses this ethical position, along with the information that becomes apparent through the disclosure functions, to provoke a level of empathy from the reader that may not have been there otherwise.

In "Chapter Two: Best Friends" Patty immediately admits that during her first three years at college "she simply didn't have a state of consciousness" (49). What Patty goes on to detail is her college basketball career, her friendship with Eliza, and the subsequent meeting of Walter Berglund and Richard Katz. Moving forward to the third chapter that comprises the first "Mistakes Were Made" ("Free Markets Foster Competition") it is possible to see why Patty was writing her story for therapeutic reasons, and why it was never intended for anyone

to read it. Patty goes into detail regarding her marriage to Walter and then, after a number of years, her affair with Richard Katz. The words and tone she uses to describe Walter make it very apparent that she respects him and loves him, but feels that her life is being lived in “Pattyland” or “Mistakeland” (172). Having already destroyed her relationship with her son, Joey, Patty felt that she had “fucked it up royally, Patty did, and then proceeded to become quite unhinged” (150). All the behavior that follows this statement is in agreement with the assessment provided by Patty. She is “quite unhinged” and it becomes difficult as an authorial audience to witness her poorer decisions, like having sex with Richard Katz, when, thanks to both of the telling functions, we are all too aware of the underlying causes and Patty’s clear acknowledgment of them. By utilizing Patty’s confessional, yet third-person narration, it is possible to understand her ethical position. Patty herself refers to her narration as “the autobiographer’s sorry recollection” (127). Patty’s morals might not be in line with the authorial audience’s; she would be the first to agree that her “really big life mistake” was to believe in the positive and good “version” of Patty that Walter believed in so fervently (74-75). Yet, the authorial audience is given all of the tools to accept that Patty has faults, ethical as well as emotional, through the ethics of the telling. As Wayne C. Booth so aptly stated, “The solution to the problem of maintaining sympathy despite almost crippling faults was primarily to use the heroine herself as a kind of narrator, though in third person, reporting on her own experience” (*The Rhetoric of Fiction* 245).

The second section titled “Mistakes Were Made (Conclusion): A Sort of Letter to Her Reader by Patty Berglund” is addressed entirely to Walter. This is an interesting evolution of the previous ethics of the telling as there are multiple levels of communication. Patty is directly addressing Walter, though she still writes in third person, while also functioning as a narrator addressing an authorial audience. Here, closer to the end of the novel, we receive a summary of what has happened in Patty’s life since she was kicked out of Walter’s house after his (unintended) reading of her first manuscript. She acknowledges that she is faulted, and that “Nobody will ever mistake her for a pillar of resolve and dignity” (509). Patty also correctly assesses that any reconciliation she might have with Walter is “a wildly unlikely scenario, and by no stretch of justice one that she deserves” (535). This assessment accurately displays Patty’s ethical position in regard to her past behavior and to her future chances for redemption in Walter’s eyes. Because in the end, it is only Walter that Patty cares to address. Richard Katz is no longer important, and her children don’t need her. Patty comes to realize

that “Their old theory – that he loved and needed her more than she loved and needed him – had been exactly backwards. And now she’d lost the love of her life” (509).

To read the two “Mistakes” sections as a proper authorial audience, and to ignore the transformation of Patty as a character and as an ethical creature is impossible. The resentment that is implied in her tone and behavior throughout the novel is now absent from the final “Mistakes” section. Martha Nussbaum accurately states that “resentment, directed at someone whom one has loved, is a morally ugly condition, and one incompatible with a certain sort of truthful seeing” (334). The ethical trajectory of Patty’s telling functions has left behind the resentment present in the beginning of the story, as she now truthfully acknowledges her prior moral condition, and how she has taken steps to remedy her ethical position. Resentment aside, the two Patty’s differ on a number of levels: the aesthetic separation of the two sections and the style of the discourse that Patty, as narrator, directs to her readers (to Walter as well as the authorial audience), demonstrates a progression that enables Patty to evolve as an ethical tool while contributing to the aesthetic of the novel. During this evolution, and due to the insights that we acquire through her open reporting and, at times, unapologetic portrayals, we see that high on the scale of Patty’s characteristics is honesty. The evolution of Patty Berglund is fueled by a need for honesty with herself and her husband. That is what finally contributes to the freedom she attains from her past ghosts and, most importantly, mistakes. The evolution of Patty’s ethical position is thus shown through her own autobiographical discourse, as the narrator she utilizes (a third person version of herself) makes peace with the characters around her, understands that she is potentially beyond forgiveness, and does so with a tone of repentance, enabling the audience (be it Walter or the flesh and blood reader) to reconfigure their actual expectations for a successful ending of the novel.

In the section titled “2004” there are six chapters that give further insight, via a third-person omniscient narrator, to the lives of Walter, Richard Katz, and Joey. These are the men in Patty’s life and in order to comprehend the Berglund’s and their marriage, the ethical positions of these other characters are important to take into account, if for no other reason than their functions in the “pinball” game that is aptly referenced by Walter as the condition of his existence (318).

In a novel that struggles to define elements like characters, marriage, and freedom as good or bad, there is an unnerving amount of ambiguity present. Remembering the previous definition of the term ‘ambiguous’, it is merely important to see the multiple meanings of

each character and theme, and their effect on the reader's final interpretation and configuration of the story. As we have already seen, it is impossible to make strict ethical judgments when the characters waver to the extent they do in Franzen's novel. The struggle to do the right thing is present in every page; yet, the poignancy of the ethical positions taken by these many-sided characters is one more element in the ties that bind the authorial audience, and the flesh-and-blood reader to them. "2004" builds on the progression in six portrait-like sections, while detailing the ethical positions of the men in Patty's life.

There are numerous points that emphasize the theme of Walter's niceness, yet the novel provides an alternative view of Walter in the section titled "The Fiend of Washington." This is in reference to the film Walter and Patty saw while in college, *The Fiend of Athens* (97-98). Patty remembers the film as a story of mistaken identity in which a "mild-mannered" accountant is pictured on the front of a newspaper as a criminal leader. After failing to convince the gangs that embrace him after he runs from the law that he is, in fact, not the Fiend, he changes his mind "*and becomes their fearless leader*" (Franzen's emphasis, 98). When Walter becomes the Fiend of Washington, it is not due to a case of mistaken identity; he is the same man as before but with mistaken ethics. While he was previously depicted as merely nice, and agreeable, Walter's new ethical position in the narrative is defined by his choice to start a life with Lalitha, and his decision to cooperate with the coal industry. Neither adultery nor environmental devastation rate high on a list of ethical achievements, and the journey Walter takes to move towards his new ethical position is slow and painful, but easy to identify throughout the text. Walter discovers that "the worst fears" he had ever had about Patty and Richard were true (458), has an affair with Lalitha (465-66), and then admits that "I've sort of lost my moral bearings lately" (474). Walter's doubtful and ambiguous behavior is narrated in a relatively objective fashion, yet it is obvious that he is operating in uncharted ethical territory when he voices his doubts and concerns to Lalitha, regarding both their relationship and their work with the coal mining industry. All of his ethical issues come to a boiling point during his infamous speech opening the new body-armor plant which will provide all of the jobs for the now displaced inhabitants of Forster Hollow. Walter explodes and all of his frustrations with himself and his new position as an ethically compromised figure come to the forefront.

The evolution of Walter Berglund's ethical position, when compared to Patty's ethical position, is a direct opposite. Looking at the ethical trajectories of the two characters; Patty gains strength and insight as Walter loses his grasp on what is right and wrong, making a

number of ethical compromises involving his relationships and his commitment to conservationism. This complicates the authorial audience's comprehension of Walter, yet not in the way one might predict. There was ample warning in the beginning of the novel that Walter was not the perfect father and husband that he appeared to be, so the element of surprise is absent from these revelations. An interesting facet of this instability is that Walter becomes more likeable, someone it is easier to feel empathy for, as he spirals downward into dubious ethical territory. Most importantly, Walter's role evolves from an ethically ambiguous position to a man in need of redemption. This redemption can only come at the conclusion of the story with the solution of the global instability of the novel.

Walter is not the sole focus of "2004," and some words regarding the ethical positions presented by Richard Katz and Joey Berglund are also relevant when discussing the ambiguous nature of the characters in the novel. Richard Katz, a musician and Walter's college friend, is troubled on many levels, but still a likeable character. He is intelligent, critical, and judges other characters well, as displayed by his accurate reading of Eliza, Patty's friend from college, and her psychotic behavior (68). Richard also clearly articulates the ambiguity of something as simple as "integrity." "'Integrity's a neutral value. Hyenas have integrity, too. They're pure hyena'" (230). If the authorial audience is to interpret Richard in a likewise manner, it is sufficient to say that he is also a character with a neutral value, who happens to be pure Richard. Richard weighs truth to one's self as integrity, and from that ethical position he can love Walter as a best friend, and yet, believe that he is going to "do a different kind of favor" for Walter by sleeping with Patty (231). As one of the main characters, Richard's roles include being a brother to Walter, a love interest for Patty, and someone who is able to develop the themes that guide our characters through the story world: freedom and competition. Even as he goes about his business in the story, it is possible to see that he has no ethical position that will grant him a long-standing relationship with Patty, or an easy friendship with Walter. He too easily embraces the hard life of a rock star, while casually regarding the ethical dilemmas of the Berglunds as something having little to do with him. He is pure Richard.

Joey Berglund is another ambiguous character who can be defined by both his good behavior and his poorer decisions. The novel details his relationships with his mother Patty and with his girlfriend/wife Connie; both problematic for differing reasons. Joey defines Patty as "a nattering old lady" even as she is in the process of agreeing to send him money (242), and keeps his relationship with Connie, both pre- and post-marital, a secret for a large portion

of the novel. If honesty is one of the few prevalent ethical values regarded as important in *Freedom*, then Joey has failed that particular test. After marrying Connie, Joey goes on a business trip to secure their financial future, and spends the first few days of it contemplating sex with Jenna, the sister of his best friend. Joey does ultimately find redemption at the end of the novel, but this is through Walter's influence and guidance.

Joey's main function as a character and as an ethical position, is as an example of what can result from Patty's smothering parenting style. He sees the world as a place that is supposed to work for him, not against him, and is greatly troubled when 9/11 occurs and interrupts his first year of college. This ethical position, an almost condescending attitude towards everyone and everything, is richly described in Joey's interactions and judgments. As a character, he is confused, yet arrogant. This is reflected in his relationship with Connie, who eagerly agrees to anything he says, while she plans their future together. All three of the character functions Phelan defines (mimetic, thematic, and synthetic (*Living to Tell* 12-13)) can, in Joey's case, be seen as contributing to the ethical position he takes. Mimetically, Joey is a semi-corrupt youth with a poor track record when it comes to honesty. Thematically, Joey represents the youth of America at a specific point in history as a product of a specific type of ethically compromised parent. Synthetically, we see Joey's function in the novel as highlighting the more desperate situation his parents find themselves in. Joey is, after all, secondary to the global instability, yet he serves an important aesthetic purpose as an ethical tool in relation to the other characters due to the various themes and ethics he represents.

The third and final point is that the progression of the novel, as well as the development of the overall themes of freedom and competition, has guided the authorial audience towards a desire for a positive outcome to befall these ethically ambiguous characters. It is beneficial to begin with a brief look at the themes of freedom and competition in relation to the ethics and aesthetics of Franzen's novel. Phelan discusses themes and states that "the function of themes (or elements of thought) in mimetic works is to enhance our understanding of characters, their choices, and their situations and, thus, enhance the emotional power of these elements" (*Experiencing Fiction* 82). In other words, an understanding of the thematic also underscores the ethical and aesthetic roles the characters play.

Freedom, as a concept, is mentioned throughout the novel and is most clearly defined during a conversation between Jonathan's father Howard, and Joey.

“[...] I’m guessing you’ve already had the experience of being frustrated with people who aren’t as bright as you are. People who are not only unable but *unwilling* to admit certain truths whose logic is self-evident to you. Who don’t even seem to *care* that their logic is bad. Have you never been frustrated that way?”

“But that’s because they’re free,” Joey said. “Isn’t that what freedom is for? The right to think whatever you want? I mean, I admit, it’s a pain in the ass sometimes” (267-68).

Howard is quick to agree that, “Freedom is a pain in the ass” (268). Yet earlier in the book there is the plaque at Jessica’s school stating “USE WELL THY FREEDOM” (184), and there is almost an implicit understanding that freedom is something that everyone in America has, whether or not they possess the logic and brains to use it. Refuting any claims that Franzen may only be critiquing the freedoms of the upper-middle class, Walter succinctly states that “You may be poor, but the one thing nobody can take from you is the freedom to fuck up your life whatever way you want to” (361). Richard Katz, after attempting to lure Patty back to him so that “Walter can have his freedom” (375), contemplates suicide in order to guarantee all of their freedom from each other (379).

The sole character that is defined as “a free man” is Walter’s brother Mitch (503). This is interesting due to Mitch’s marginal place in society, his inability to live in a traditional family with his wife and children, his alcoholism, and his lack of steady work or income. To most observers, including the authorial audience, Mitch is a sad portrait of a man, yet he is free. The focalization of the section regarding Mitch is through Walter, and his experiences. Walter is seeing his brother for the first time in years and it seems is able to build a respect for him that was previously impossible. Walter has learned the value of freedom since kicking Patty out and taking up with Lalitha. Mitch thus becomes a useful example of the ethics inherent in freedom, and the need to take a careful position when exercising one’s own personal choices. Walter’s ethical position throughout the story is thus seen as compared to Mitch’s own ethical trajectory; while Walter is spiraling into a state of confused ethical dilemmas, Mitch is able to cling fast to the one ethical position he has always had, and which enables him to lead a solitary life with his alcohol. The thematic question which affects the ethics of the story, as well as some reader’s interpretive judgments: at what price, freedom?

Combined with freedom, the second theme that contributes to our understanding of the ethics of the novel is competition. This begins with Patty’s discussion of her athletic career in college, yet quickly carries over into most of the relationships in the novel. Patty is in competition with her siblings, her neighbors, and her husband. Walter is solely in competition



with Richard, as they have a “sibling thing” (131). However, the interesting thing about this theme is that it is not just a point of the characters’ ethical positions; it is also present in the underlying ethics of the discourse regarding freedom. In multiple places throughout the novel there is development of the free-market theory and the consequences of competition. There is even the chapter titled “Free Markets Foster Competition” narrated by Patty, with the consequences that she cheats on Walter with Richard, apparently demonstrating her acceptance of the free market. Through the progression of this discussion, the novel begins to emphasize that the competition that the free-market and that American freedom foster, may not be so good for the characters and their ethical positions as it’s cracked up to be. The ambiguity of a rather socially acceptable concept, at least in America, expands the parameters of expectation regarding that particular theme. When the capitalist system, serving as the bedrock for Western society, is brought into question, there can be a call for a necessary reconfiguration on the part of the authorial audience.

It is in their poignant head-on tackling of the difficulties inherent in their freedom and their competitive natures, that the characters in *Freedom* gain our empathy. The progression smoothly guides the reader through the ethics of their decisions, while using the telling functions within the novel to help adjust the parameters of expectation and the actual expectations. The use of Patty as the narrator of her own downfall reveals not only her story but also, through the way the story is told, encourages actual expectations that provoke a collaboration between herself and the reader. The ethics of the telling and the told, through the progression of the novel, as well as the development of the overall themes of freedom and competition, have guided the authorial audience towards a desire for a positive outcome to befall Patty and the other characters. This middle section of the novel is where characters develop their particular ethical and aesthetic roles in order to lead the reader to a satisfactory conclusion; a conclusion with surprising yet not unpredictable resolutions for these flawed characters. The final configuration of the characters, their ethical positions, and an analysis of the instabilities that have arisen throughout the narrative is what is left for the concluding chapter. It is important now to see if the authorial audience is rewarded for following the ethical and aesthetical directions implicit in the novel.

### ***The Ending: Judging Characters, The Ethics of Rhetorical Purpose, or, A Recipe for Empathy***

In the final section of the novel, titled “Canterbridge Estates Lake”, the discourse is once again presented via the internal heterodiegetic narrator (similar to the very first chapter), with focalization that differs between three segments; two utilizing the neighbors, and one utilizing Walter. This aesthetic format, combined with a final look at the ethics of the telling and the told, creates an opportunity to see the final effects of a, hopefully, successful collaboration between Franzen and the reader. More specifically, have the characters evolved enough throughout the novel to display specific aesthetic roles as ethical tools?

By the beginning of “Canterbridge Estates Lake” the reader/authorial audience is supplied with all of the necessary details of the Berglund family and their fall from grace. The function of the ending of the novel becomes, in a sense, a wait for a verdict. The only instability remaining for the characters and the reader is the final judgment of Patty by Walter. Since she had addressed her final “Mistakes” manuscript to him, and had been encouraged by others to let him know her story, it is implied that this may, in fact, occur. But a verdict, even one that is hoped for thanks to the disclosure functions in the story, is not so quickly handed down. First, the characters’ ethical positions are once again explored, and the authorial audience given a chance to come to a final reconfiguration through an adjustment of their actual expectations before the conclusion is delivered.

The characters’ new ethical positions represent the changes that have occurred since the beginning of the novel. Walter, previously known as a nice neighbor, is now a suspicious, cat-hating loner described as “a good Minnesotan and reasonably friendly, but there was something about him, a political trembling in his voice, a fanatic gray stubble on his cheeks, that rubbed the families on Canterbridge Court the wrong way” (542). Walter is no longer guilty of being too nice. He has redeemed himself for that particular crime, and seems to be trying to get on with his life after the loss of Lalitha. His main focus is directed towards the welfare of the small birds around his home, and his only joy comes from nature. This is apparent to the neighbors at the new development of homes across the lake from what used to be his isolated cabin. They feel Walter is “a potentially deviant hermit” (544) when the truth is that Walter, literally, has lost all of his “free space” (365). This is the problem driving the conflict between the neighbors and Walter. The greatest ally Walter has in the beginning of this chapter is the narrator; who goes on to describe the most problematic neighbor of all,

Linda Hoffbauer. Linda is depicted as a Suburban-driving housewife who is more interested in her children and cat than the local wildlife. Interestingly, the most appropriate description of Linda is facilitated through her own thoughts regarding Walter: “Walter seemed to her like one of those big-government liberals who wanted to hand out condoms in the schools and take away people’s guns and force every citizen to carry a national identity card” (545).

Linda is seen as Walter’s nemesis; a conservative, anti-condom, pro-gun mother. Knowing what ethical position Walter takes in regard to a character like Linda does as much for the authorial audience’s judgment of him as it does for the equivalent assessment of Linda; in this case, Walter is given the ethical higher ground, even if one takes into consideration the fact that he kidnapped her cat and drove it to another city. The narrator is able to deliver the pertinent ethical positions of each character through the telling functions, with the consequence that Walter is seen as deserving sympathy and empathy, as opposed to Linda who nobody is really fond of. When Patty returns and starts living as Walter’s wife again, Linda is unable to find a negative ethical position in Patty’s statement that she and Walter “were taking a little breather from each other” (559). Linda’s reaction was that, “This was an odd and rather clever formulation, difficult to find clear moral fault with” (559). After falling out of grace among the other residents of her street, it is only when Linda admits that she shares the common opinion that Patty is great that the neighbors accept her again (561).

Walter’s reception of Patty, signaling the impending conclusion of the novel, came as a result of her cold-weather vigil on his porch and was initially reluctant, but ultimately showed that he had come to the understanding that they needed each other. Walter’s ethical position in regard to Patty is similar to the ethical position occupied by the authorial audience: he becomes an empathetic observer from his position outside of her life. Patty, having addressed her manuscript to Walter in a compelling, apologetic, and realistic fashion, knows that her reconciliation with Walter is “a wildly unlikely scenario, and by no stretch of justice one that she deserves” (535). Patty’s prior acknowledgment that she is undeserving of this second chance eases the judgments that may follow Walter’s acceptance of her apology. The authorial audience also benefits from this, and is more likely to accept the ending of the novel because the appropriate level of penance has been achieved by Patty.

Once the arrival of the story has been delivered and accepted by the authorial audience, what follows is the “farewell.” These “concluding exchanges” (Phelan, *Experiencing Fiction* 21) are especially useful in Patty and Walter’s case, as they helpfully

underscore the new ethical positions proposed by the implied author and the audience's collaboration. Once the Berglund's have, again, established themselves as good neighbors, they announce their decision to move to New York. This makes the final revelation, that their property is turned into a bird sanctuary named after Lalitha, an added bonus to the already satisfactory outcome of the plot. If the authorial audience had any remaining doubts about the ethical positions of Walter and Patty, they are quieted in the face of this final decision. Walter and Patty are no longer ethically unstable, only two characters who were troubled, and who have moved past their problems.

In conclusion, I would like to apply this analysis of Franzen's novel to my problem statements. Looking back to my first point, *Freedom's* characters are examples of careful aesthetic roles as ethical tools. Patty is using the full force of an autobiographical voice in order to gain the understanding of a skeptical audience. Her behavior alone would not have warranted the empathy the reader acquires over time; Patty behaved badly. Complicating matters, and making the novel more interesting, Walter also becomes an ethical tool for the purpose of reflecting an opposite of Patty. He is good gone bad, while she is bad gone good. What this means for their aesthetic roles as ethical tools is that when they are not being the thematic American family, dealing with American problems; when they are not being the synthetic characters of a social novel; and when they are not mimetically representing possible people, the Berglunds are conveying the entire spectrum of ethical positions possible within a marriage, using the ethical positions to make points about their own behavior, and using the disclosure functions throughout the novel to comment on the inevitability of their situation given the culture and time they inhabit. They are a strong bridge between the ethical and the narratological in the roles they play, the positions they take, and, perhaps most importantly for a narratologist, how they convey those roles and positions over the course of the narrative.

My second point, that the ethics of the telling is vital for the reader's comprehension and expectations for the characters because of the role it plays in guiding readers, is most evident in the use of the autobiographical sections of the novel. Had Patty not been given the opportunity to address the reader in such a direct fashion, it would have been difficult for the reader to adjust their actual expectations to the level necessary for the conclusion of the story. Put another way, Patty was easier to understand, the choices she made seemed more reasonable, and it became evident to the reader that the clues they ought to follow through the story will potentially lead to some sort of resolution to Patty's problems. Also evident over

time through the disclosure functions is the fact that Patty's problems are Walter's problems. It would be easy to say that this is a common feature of marriage, however troubled. Yet the ethics of the telling come into the forefront in this case due to their explicit parameters of expectation and their more subtle actual expectations.

The third and final point relating to my problem statement is that the ethics of the characters and the presentation of these ethics affect the progression of the story because it relies on the continuous reconfiguration of the readers' actual expectations for their comprehension. Patty and Walter's discourse, while maintaining a relatively straightforward trajectory, is evolving while being presented in a sort of rhetorical puzzle. The way the various chapters are presented, and how the various characters are portrayed, affects the reader's actual expectations over time. Thinking back to our previous discussion of ambiguity, which worked as an aesthetic and ethical tool on its own in the story, it is possible to reflect on Franzen's use of the multiple meanings and the underlying messages that came with such a technique. One likely result of using ambiguity in *Freedom* is an increased amount of empathy for these characters who are neither good nor bad. Where there are multiple possible meanings, the chance for multiple interpretations is greater, and judgments must be tapered; all of which will affect the aesthetics of the story over time. In other words, elements within the ethics of the told can in some ways be seen as a motor for the narrative, much as the telling functions can also work pushing the progression of the story forward to a satisfactory conclusion.

The ethics of rhetorical purpose, and their role in judging characters, are apparent if one approaches the novel from any of the seven narrative judgments as defined by Phelan in *Experiencing Fiction*. Taking Phelan's third point, "*individual narratives explicitly or more often implicitly establish their own ethical standards in order to guide their audiences to particular ethical judgments*" (10), it is possible to see the link between Franzen's successful ending, incorporating Patty and Walter's ethical positions and their expected future together, and the skillful aesthetic handling of the ethical positions early on in the novel. Franzen's narrative had to compel the authorial audience to collaborate in a potentially difficult ethical endeavor, and to begin to follow a specific ethical standard, as opposed to their own default ethics as flesh-and-blood readers. Adultery and environmental devastation are two extremely ethically loaded subjects, and to coerce an authorial audience into a position of careful observer and, ultimately, understanding, is no small feat. Franzen also displays a narrative technique that is aware of Phelan's fifth point, "*individual readers need to evaluate the ethical*

*standards and purposes of individual narratives, and they are likely to do so in different ways*” (13). By taking into account the unstable ethical response from a varied audience, and offering a story with an aesthetic that encourages objectivity, as well as an ethically satisfactory ending, Franzen, the implied author, is doing his best to ensure that readers of *Freedom* come as close as possible to his vision.

Throughout *Freedom* there is a substantial awareness of Jonathan Franzen’s literary achievement. Not only has he approached the themes of freedom and competition, applied them to society as well as family, and portrayed a marriage in turmoil, he has used an aesthetic format that, instead of merely disclosing story fact after story fact, works as a lesson in how to move ethically with characters. Thus, Franzen is training the authorial audience in a story world that relies less on selective disclosure for reconfiguration than it does on encouraging ethical positions that benefit the characters, and the audience’s experience of them. Throughout the novel the characters are faced with decisions and trials, both from exterior sources and internal, emotional sources. While observing the developments and ramifications that stem from the characters’ ethical positions in regard to their dilemmas, the authorial audience is consistently taught a new, one could even say modern, version of what it is to be “good.” Good characters and readers, as suggested by Franzen the implied author, are able to follow an ethical trajectory that may in the beginning seem ambiguous or unrewarding, and then in the face of poor ethical and moral choices see possibility for penance and redemption. Patty demonstrates that redemption is available to those who demonstrate an inner awareness of their failures, as well as an acceptance of their unworthiness. Most importantly, the authorial audience is rewarded for their continuous collaboration and desire to see the Berglunds together again.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Throughout these pages I have attempted to show how the rhetorical theory of narrative can help the critical reader to understand a number of interesting points in regard to characters, ethics, and the presentation of both elements throughout a fictional narrative. More specifically, I have tried to tie the three texts closely to the problem statement from my introduction, while developing lines of inquiry that hopefully can bridge out from James Phelan's work. To end this study with a summary of the texts we have covered will give a brief reminder of, first, the texts analyzed via Phelan's rhetorical theory of narrative, and, second, the texts seen with my own theoretical elements. It is not my intent to be repetitive here, only to give a clearer and more concise vision in order to then highlight a way forward.

### *Texts*

Beginning with *How We Are Hungry* and the two stories from Dave Eggers' collection, it was helpful to look for the ethics of the told in one story and the ethics of the telling in the other. The two stories differ in both subject matter and in telling style, yet the most vital difference for the study is the two different presentations of ethics. In the first story, "Up the Mountain Coming Down Slowly," the ethics of the telling are behind the most rhetorically pleasing aspects of the story. The telling functions, or the narrator's reporting along with the disclosure functions, make it possible for the reader to understand Rita and the journey she is undertaking, while at the same time conveying an unspoken message regarding the impact of her decisions upon her surroundings. This story fits into this thesis like a cornerstone of the larger structure of the rhetorical theory of narrative. It is a prime example of how both of the telling functions can work in earnest to convey their messages. What is fascinating about "Up the Mountain" is that those two messages are different and yet complimentary in service to the greater rhetoric of the story.

Moving on to the second story, "She Waits, Seething, Blooming," Eggers has once again composed a story with a strong underlying ethical message. The difference between "She Waits" and the first story is that, here, the ethics of the told stand clearly available for analysis from the first sentence. The ethical position of the mother doesn't need to be hinted at through the disclosure functions. "She is picturing slapping him flat and hard across the face

and is thinking that the sound it would make would almost make up for her worry, her inability to sleep” (83). This is a clear report of what the unnamed mother is capable of, and, as her ethical position changes rapidly through evening, as she waits for her son to arrive home, she displays an uninterrupted view into the evolution of an angry woman. The key point to understand from this narrative example is the importance of following the path the various ethical positions lay out for the reader. If one is unable to follow the mother from her initial anger to her rationalizing, then to her expectation of joy in confrontation, the progression and thus the resolution of the story will be lost on the reader.

Colum McCann’s *Let the Great World Spin* was elementary to our understanding of the roles portraiture and lyric narrative play when part of a larger novel. Each chapter was a prime example of the ethics of the told and the ethics of the telling as working via Phelan’s theory. By using Phelan’s work to help identify the various ethical positions of the characters, and then by looking for the different telling functions each character uses, it is possible to see just how, for example, a lyric narrative can pull a reader into a level of understanding and empathy that they might not have acquired through a different narrative device. When McCann then arranges the puzzle pieces of his serial narrative to achieve a rhetorically satisfying ending, he is in essence a useful example of each point that Phelan makes regarding the elements necessary for a collaboration between the reader and the narrator. Jaslyn, the orphaned daughter who concludes McCann’s novel, is able to use the telling functions to report that facts of what has taken place since her childhood and to use the disclosure functions to convey the level of damage done. What is heartening about her narrative is that even though the disclosure functions are working to warn the reader that this is not necessarily the perfect happy ending, there is hope for Jaslyn as she cradles the dying body of Claire.

In Jonathan Franzen’s *Freedom*, the ethics of the told and the ethics of the telling are once again serving to underscore the importance of comprehending the characters in order to comprehend the progression, and ultimately the conclusion of the story. The novel begins with its fantastic description of the neighborhood and its inhabitants, delivering an ambiguous group of characters to the reader. As the novel progresses, the story world becomes clearer, yet the ability of the reader to note which characters are actually ‘good’ is still suspended. Franzen uses the telling functions as well as the ethics of the characters to present a multitude of dilemmas to the reader. In the middle of this fictional brew are the themes that underscore how deep the characters’ problems are situated: competition, freedom, family. This entire package is skillfully pieced together, prompting the reader to come to terms with behaviors



that, while not ideal, are understandable in the characters' situations. When the reader has participated in the recursive relationship and collaborated with Franzen and his story, the conclusion becomes satisfying and rewarding.

***Theory: an application of my extensions to Phelan and the subsequent effects***

If we move on and branch out from Phelan and approach these stories using what I have posed as possible terms and additions, the theoretical yield of these stories becomes even greater. Beginning with Eggers' stories, "Up the Mountain" becomes more than just an illustrative example of the two telling functions working together; it is an opportunity to see how the *parameters of expectation* can stem from one telling function (the narrator's reporting) and how the *actual expectations* can stem from the disclosure functions in the text. By identifying these effects of functions, the task of evaluating the source of the reader's enlightenment in regard to the various themes and motivations becomes less vague. It becomes possible to point to the specific functions that are letting the reader know that Rita's trip up Kilimanjaro is not an unproblematic journey because of the effects of those functions. In other words, Phelan's theory works when applied to this text. However, if a critic wants to say exactly why the telling functions are working as they do, more adequate terms are necessary. By utilizing *parameters of expectation* and *actual expectations* it becomes possible to identify not only what the functions are, but what they are doing as well. Phelan did well to define the puzzle pieces, but when using the two new terms it is possible to say what job the particular pieces are performing, and sometimes even why.

Think back to the difficulty Phelan had when asked to define the term "dynamics."<sup>22</sup> This is where that discussion becomes relevant. If the motor of a narrative is something propelling a reader forward, and if that motor is simultaneously causing effects for the reader, can it be possible that this motor is composed at least in part by the telling functions and their effects? Would that make a sufficient definition for "dynamics" in a literary sense?

Returning to the texts, the points that came forward from an analysis of "She Waits" serve to build upon this line of inquiry. One of the points I listed after analyzing that text was that progression can serve as an aesthetic tool for the ethics of the story. This is due to the very clear need to progress from ethical position to ethical position in Eggers' story. The

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<sup>22</sup> "Introduction" 12.

narrative moves forward because the reader must move forward with the character in her various stages of despair. The ethics of the told are thus in a premium role here as the comprehension of the character's ethics in her story world are the main focus of the discourse. What is very interesting, though, is that while the ethical positions are forefront, the resolution of the story lies in the comprehension of the movement itself between ethical positions. A reader must understand the fine line between anger and compassion. This fine line seems to also work as the path the reader must follow in order to reach the conclusion in a satisfactory way. What this means for the concept of dynamics is that sometimes the telling functions aren't the only aesthetic tool creating the momentum of the story. Ethical positions, their strengthening and weakening, and the movements between themselves can also create momentum without the disclosure functions working at top speed.

If we then take the concept of dynamics and apply what Eggers' stories show us, it then becomes possible to see the definition of such a concept integrating both the telling functions and the ethical positions, as both have aesthetic effects. In essence, the ethics of the telling and the ethics of the told are inseparable from the momentum of the story.

This is a beneficial point at which to return to our other two texts, as what I have stated so far regarding *Freedom* and *Let the Great World Spin* uses concepts from James Phelan's work on ethical positions and telling functions as we have already discussed. What is now important to identify are the key points that branch away and help add to a definition of characters as ethical tools, with aesthetic roles, and adding to the 'dynamics' of the progression. As I have claimed before, McCann is using a sort of stepping-stone technique, building upon the revelation of characters throughout his novel, while making good use of the inherent qualities in lyric narrative and portraiture. Adding to that the referentiality of a nonfictional character to add a level of credence and structure to the path, it is no wonder that his novel is judged to be so successful. Where it is possible to apply new terms and to bridge out from Phelan's work in regard to this novel is twofold: (1) *Let the Great World Spin* was an example of characters inhabiting roles outside of their previously identified (by Phelan) mimetic, synthetic, thematic roles. In the various methods of character narration working together to build the novel, the characters also had aesthetic roles as ethical tools, conveying ethical positions while using their telling functions to give the narrative the level of movement required. (2) What the elements of portraiture, lyric, and referential fiction did was more than just character revelation and thematic diversion; each character, their chosen telling format, with its inherent telling functions becomes an important stepping stone in the progression of

the story. Each ethical position and each revelation become key markers for the reader to evaluate and move on from. The ethical position of Tillie the prostitute is not to be ignored. As she goes through her history and the disclosure functions are working through repetition, reminding us that Tillie is in jail and wants to leave this world for a better place, she is an ethical tool performing an aesthetic service to the larger narrative. As Lara comes to terms with the person she was when she hit Corrigan's van, how she didn't recognize herself any longer, she is using portraiture to reveal where she was and where she wants to go. McCann's characters are being used as tools for ethical rhetoric because of their aesthetic roles. Their ethical positions not only contribute to the progression, but they also provoke empathy while using the telling functions to move the story along.

A related point that builds on my terms is the importance of the ethical aspects of effects of functions. These ethical aspects are to be found in each of our texts, and I went into detail concerning their presence in Lara and Tillie's narratives in *Let the Great World Spin*. I argued that Lara, as narrator, was able to use the telling functions in her portraiture to provoke both parameters of expectation and actual expectations; and while doing so there arose effects stemming from both that strengthened the reader's collaboration as their expectations became more inseparable from the ethics of the character. Here, I would like to apply that theoretical approach to *Freedom* in order to demonstrate a conclusive stance on the effects of functions as well as their ethical aspects.

Franzen's novel builds upon what we have already learned about the importance of the reader's collaboration with what is said in the story as well as what is unsaid in the story. It also uses the characters in a way that, while showing the reader what their motivations are for their choices and behaviors, they are also weaving a compelling narrative that begs to be followed because of the ethical positions that are constantly evolving. Like the mother in "She Waits," it is important to move with Patty from each of her ethical positions in order to comprehend her in the conclusion of the story. Patty is therefore more than just a thematic, synthetic, or mimetic character: she is using her ethical position(s) to make a point about herself and her story world, and the movement between these positions affects the aesthetics of the narrative, thus her aesthetic role.

Earlier I have gone into detail regarding Patty's use of the telling functions and the specific qualities that her narrative entails. What is helpful to remember while looking forward is that Patty, in her two "Mistakes" segments, used the telling functions in three

important ways: (1) Patty presented her narrative in an autobiographical third-person format, creating a space between herself and the character presented in her pages, and thus making the narrator's report of the action an ethically-loaded action; (2) Patty used clear and unapologetic language to explain rather difficult and ethically-problematic situations, activating a disclosure function that would provoke the reader's actual expectations towards a different direction than the previous chapter ("Good Neighbors"); (3) The telling functions in Patty's two segments are working together to communicate her side of the story, while also making sure that the reader can acknowledge the underlying hope for forgiveness she is conveying through the disclosure functions.

The ethical aspects of the effects of telling functions, or what happens ethically in regard to parameters of expectation and actual expectations, can be seen in how successful the collaboration between the reader and the narrator becomes. If the narrator, in this case Patty, is able to use the disclosure functions underlying their telling to direct the reader to feelings of forgiveness, or perhaps just the beginnings of empathy, then that is an ethical aspect of the effects of the functions. When Patty writes in third-person, "Patty knew, in her heart, that he was wrong in his impression of her. And the mistake she went on to make, the really big life mistake, was to go along with Walter's version of her in spite of knowing that it wasn't right," it is apparent to the reader that the narrator's report is a confession, the disclosure functions are underscoring Patty's acknowledgement of her mistakes, and the actual expectations begin to include a hope that either Patty becomes a good person, or Walter accepts her for the flawed individual she so fervently believes herself to be (74-75). It is in that hope the reader acquires that the ethical aspect of the actual expectations resides; the hope is an effect that is caused by the increased understanding between Patty and her reader.

Patty and Walter Berglund are first revealed as interpreted through the narrator and the neighbors, giving the reader a chance to make some parameters of expectation from that report. As soon as the novel moves into the second section, Patty's "autobiographical" discourse takes center stage with its confessions and prompting of readers' actual expectations. Then throughout the novel, while the characters do all the wrong things for the right reasons, and vice versa, it seems that their ethical positions are either climbing or falling on trajectories that clearly affect the story as a whole. When towards the end of the book Patty is confessing to Richard that she wants to speak to Walter again he responds, "You know how to tell a story, [...] Why don't you tell him a story?" (537). It is the telling of Patty's story that results in the resolution of the novel's main instability; will Walter and Patty ever make their

marriage work? Thus, in a circular manner, the second section of Patty's autobiography is spurred into existence and the reader sees how each level of her ethical progression has resulted in an aesthetic progression as well. The dynamics or motor of Franzen's narrative is thus seen as dependent on a recursive relationship that entails the reader moving on the same ethical progression as the characters, the author utilizing the telling functions to create a viable 'autobiography' for Patty, both meeting within the ethics and aesthetics of the story world.

### ***Functions, characters, and effects: potential motors of narrative?***

To summarize the points demonstrated by the texts regarding the telling functions, their effects, and the ethical aspects of said effects: (1) Telling functions are an essential key to unlocking the puzzle of the communication between the narrator and the reader. They provoke parameters of expectation through the report and interpretation of events as delivered by the narrator. They provoke actual expectations through the disclosure functions that deliver clues to the reader as to what may happen outside of the narrator's report. (2) These effects of the telling functions can work together, even while sending messages that aren't necessarily in league with each other. These effects add to the reader's experience of the story through the multiple levels of understanding they make possible. (3) The ethical aspects of the effects of the telling functions are in congruence with the parameters of expectation and the actual expectations that spur them into existence. A reader will, over time, have a difficult time separating their own expectations from the ethics of the narrator(s) and or character(s) they are reading about.

Each of the texts has also contributed to the ideas earlier put forward in my tripartite problem statement, and each text gave evidence varying in quantity and quality for my claims. Part one claims that

*characters have a role within narrative as tools for ethical rhetoric, and that is something that is both implicit in the mimetic, thematic and synthetic roles they play, yet this role also transcends these categories to become an overt quality in itself. It is this aesthetic role that provokes judgments while also working as a telling function: in essence it is the bridge between the ethical and narratological.*

Each one of the characters met in this thesis was working as an ethical tool in service to the greater point of the narrative. What is fascinating when identifying the aesthetic role of the

characters as ethical tools is that no one character shares their role with another. Patty Berglund, while eliciting some of the same ethical responses as the unnamed mother in Eggers' "She Waits," is performing a similar aesthetic role, but is a different level of ethical tool altogether due to her use of the telling functions. It can thus be said from looking at the three texts in this thesis that while all characters can have this aesthetic role as an ethical tool, each will be individual and unique to themselves.

Part two of my problem statement claimed that

*the ethics of the telling, or the telling functions, work as the aesthetic tools for the implied author to use when guiding the reader into a collaboration with their characters' ethical positions. More importantly, the effects of the telling functions, namely the parameters of expectation and the actual expectations lead the reader into such a collaboration.*

Each of the texts had implicit uses and needs for the telling functions and it was thoroughly captivating to see how each narrative used the two levels of narrator functions and disclosure functions to achieve their desired effects. Most illustrative for this thesis was perhaps "Up the Mountain Coming Down Slowly" with Rita who is depicted in two very different ways by the competing telling functions. What can be added to this part of the problem statement after having looked at all three texts are two points: (1) As mentioned earlier, the collaboration of the reader is going to depend on their individual reaction to the various ethical movements of a narrator or character. Therefore, not all effects of telling functions will have the same weight with all readers. (2) There are ethical aspects of these effects of telling functions. They also vary according to the reader, yet can be defined as the ethical movements that occur within the reader when prompted by the telling functions.

The final section of my problem statement stated that

*the character-character relations and the presentation of ethical positions affects the aesthetics as well as the ethics of a story, provoking readerly judgments, thus relying on the progression of the story for comprehension of the ethics, as well as the telling functions themselves.*

Once again, this was evident in the movement required between ethical positions for both the characters and the readers in some of the texts, as well as the importance of comprehending the characters' ethics in texts where lyric and portraiture were prominent. What can now be added to that claim is the validity of the ethical aspects of the effects of the telling functions and their role in the comprehension of ethics, and thus in the progression as well.

While tackling issues of ethics in Toni Morrison's work, Molly Abel Travis wrote "the most ethical act for literature is not the bridging of gaps through the creation of empathy, but the articulation and keeping alive of intractable ethical questions about the asymmetrical relationship between self and other" (231). This is a statement that, I feel, underscores the necessity of comprehending the characters not only as they are presented through their reports and behaviors, but also in the particular way they are presented through the author's choice of aesthetic form. Altogether this underscores another "asymmetrical relationship" between the story and the reader; one that also contributes to questions of ethics.

Finally, the last questions I raised in my introduction regarding the rhetorical weight of characters, with either their strong telling functions or a vivid ethical position: must an author choose? And does this affect our judgments, as we watch the aesthetics of the text and the ethics of the characters work together? The answers that I found in the texts are no and yes, respectively. An author can utilize strong telling functions and still place an emphasis on the comprehension of characters' ethical positions. Even though none of my texts were strong examples of such an arrangement, all of them had elements of both, showing that the combination of the two is one of the important features of a narrative.

Our judgments, while affected by the various aesthetic and ethical devices in the texts, are going to be correlated to what the texts present to us. In Eggers' short stories, the judgments that surface are linked closely to what is divulged about the characters, and how they are evolving ethically over the course of the story time. In McCann's book, judgments are made during and after each portraiture or lyric narrative, easing us into comprehension of character, while divulging the few important plot features. Without the careful presentations of his characters, McCann's novel would not have given the readers the opportunity to come to benevolent terms with such ethically difficult characters like Tillie. In Franzen's novel, judgments come throughout the story, yet the telling functions in the story really underscore the characters' (especially Patty's) regret for the situations they face. All of these things affect our judgments and none are solely related to the telling functions or the ethical positions. The whole rhetorical package that is presented to the reader is responsible for the judgments that stem from the text.

What has become evident in this study of ethics and aesthetics is the inextricable link between the two when applying the rhetorical theory of narrative. Structure and form are not only used in the presentation of the characters and their ethics, they are inevitably affected by

them. This relationship, combined with what we now can suggest regarding the effects of the various functions and their ethical aspects, hints at the very real possibility that the motor of a narrative resides not only in the author's pen, but in the functions and the dynamics it generates.



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